Cultural studies on death and dying in Scandinavia

To the memory of my parents Birgit and Gustav Andersson and my uncle Johan Andersson

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Front cover
The folklife-artist Carl Gustaf Bernhardson has portrayed when the body of his stillborn brother was in secret carried by the father to the churchyard in 1923. Bohuslän Museum no 090.

Back cover
A glass of wine is drunk in memory of the deceased in her home at a funeral in western Sweden in 1973. Photo by Anders Gustavsson.

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Introduction

Death has comprised a major theme in my cultural science research during the first decade of the present century. I have presented a variety of different partial results at international conferences and symposia arranged by ISFNR (The International Society for Folk Narrative Research), SIEF (The Society International of Ethnology and Folklore) and NNT (Nordic Network of Thanatology). Acting upon the advice of foreign colleagues, I have now assembled these partial results for publication in English. This is done in order to give an international circle of readers an opportunity to acquaint themselves, in a single volume, with the research I have conducted in Scandinavia in the past decade and which, for the most part, has been published in Swedish. This project has been realized in cooperation with the Nordic Network of Thanatology, NNT, finally established during a research symposium in Ålborg, Denmark, in 2010.

One field of research that I have pursued concerns how death has been described and experienced in an agrarian environment in Sweden during the 1800s. My goal has been to describe not only the external customs, but also the intimate side of death as shown in emotions. Source material has consisted of diaries and letters written in a small community in western Sweden.

Another field of study concerns the symbols found on gravestones in Norway and Sweden in the 1990s. After modification of laws in both countries, the next of kin are allowed a much freer choice of motif than was once legally permitted. Certain similarities and also numerous differences between Norwegian and Swedish cemeteries have been illustrated in this comparative study. I have made a special study relating to the choice of gravestone motif in districts long characterized by the presence of religious revival movements. This should be seen in the light of my work in the Nordic research network Nordveck, devoted to the study of religious revival movements in Scandinavia. The relationship of death and the senses has been the subject of another special study with regard to revival movements. Sight and taste are the senses that have had special relevance in these observations.

Memorials to dead pets have begun to appear in Sweden, but not in Norway, during recent decades. My special study deals with the graves for dead cats that have been family pets. Pet cemeteries are not found everywhere in Sweden, but their number has increased in recent years, especially in larger urban areas. I have found inspiration in

studying the symbols, often natural fieldstones, marking graves for pets. Increasing individualism is also noticeable in these cemeteries. Although no religious symbols are usually allowed on memorials for dead pets, a number of crosses can still be observed. The municipalities supervising these cemeteries seek to maintain a differentiation between deceased humans and dead pets. Such sought-after differentiations by the authorities have in actual fact become progressively more weakened by praxis in Swedish pet cemeteries. Care of graves in pet cemeteries is very similar to the care bestowed on human graves. I have made certain comparative studies of equivalent Continental cemeteries in France and Portugal. These are far older and far more richly designed than those in Sweden. Properly speaking, no religious symbols of any kind are to be found in them, as this is not permitted by the authorities in these countries also.

When conducting fieldwork in cemeteries, whether this applies to graves for humans or those for pets, the scholar must observe a special thoughtfulness and consideration towards the next of kin. This also applies to any study of memorial sites over deceased persons set up on the Internet. I have therefore written a separate chapter for this book on ethical problems and the way in which I have attempted cope with the ethical concerns that must be taken into account.

All deceased people were not buried in consecrated ground in past times. This was especially true of the fishermen and seamen who were the victims of sudden death on the high seas. Their descendents still living on the coast have recently begun to erect an increasing number of collective memorials to persons lost at sea. The deceased are mentioned by name and year of death and, in some cases, by their age at the time of the tragedy.

A different form of sudden death occurs in significant numbers on roads and highways in our own time. In the light of Continental patterns, increasing numbers of memorial observations and gatherings have begun to be held at the actual sites of traffic accidents in both Norway and Sweden. The sites of death thus obtain a symbolic content having a prominent element of spontaneity. These gatherings are mostly arranged by young people who place crosses, flowers and lighted candles on the site. Their actions have an obviously unplanned character when compared with gravestones and the symbols placed on them. Similar spontaneous gatherings have also begun to take place at sites of homicide and manslaughter.

Memorial sites on the Internet are a new form for expressing grief and for remembering deceased relatives and friends. Such sites have had an explosive development during the 2000s, and again, to a greater extent in Sweden than in Norway. I have conducted a special study of the conceptions that are expressed concerning the supposed destiny of the deceased after death. This applies to the deceased persons' supernatural existence, to their opportunities for making contact with the living, and to

a future opportunity for the next of kin to experience a reunion in a life after death. One pronounced trait is that conceptions of angels have become conspicuous. The deceased is not only received by supernatural angels but is also considered to have become an angel. This in contrast to former conceptions in which the deceased was perceived of as a soul.

I have conducted a special study of memorial websites relating to suicidal acts. Such websites contain numerous distinctive elements compared to websites over other dead persons. These include criticism of the deceased, self-reproach among near relatives and friends, criticism of psychiatric treatment and repudiation of suicide guides. There are also some similarities between websites relating to suicides and those set up for other dead persons. In Sweden there is a belief in an afterlife for both of these categories of deceased persons. In Norway, however, far more restraint is shown concerning websites relating to suicide and, generally speaking, a more traditional attitude than in Sweden.

Memorial sites on the Internet are also set up for dead pets. My study deals with Sweden but also includes some comparisons with Norway and Germany. Beliefs about what happens to pets after death are expressed on the memorial sites, among these a conception in which they cross over on a so-called rainbow bridge to a new supernatural existence. In some diffuse future, the owners are thought to be reunited with their longed-for pets, after which no new separation will ever again take place.

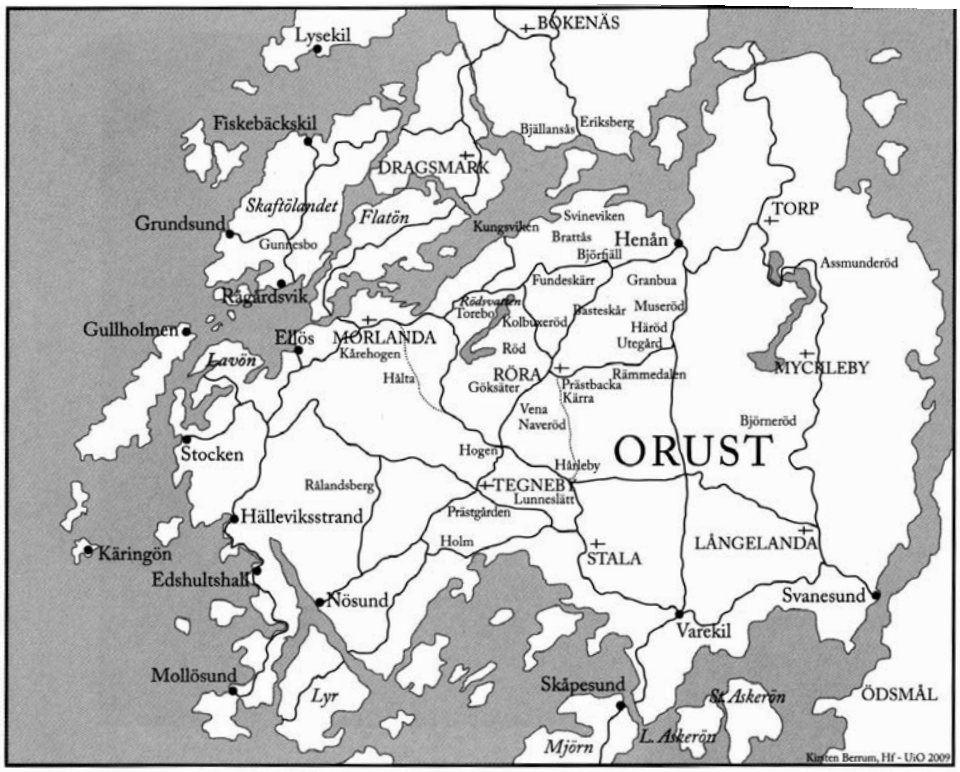
The last chapter of this book consists of my introductions to and discussions of other cultural scholars' doctoral theses in Norway, Sweden, and in Germany as well, in this past decade. The themes have to do with death in recent times, including care of terminal cancer patients, crosses placed at roadside sites of fatal traffic accidents, interviews conducted with informants who have lost a near relation due to sudden death, funerals for homosexuals who have died of Aids, cemeteries for Muslims, and school excursions to Nazi concentration camps in Poland.

1
Death in a nineteenth-century agrarian society

While conducting fieldwork for the research project "Cultural contacts in Bohuslän's coastal rural communities" in the 1970s, I came across some detailed handwritten diaries. These had been written by Jakob Jonsson, owner of Prästbacka farm in Röra parish on Orust Island in Bohuslän province. He was born on 21 July 1795 and had died on 15 March 1879. The material that has been preserved covers a period starting in 1866 and continuing on to within a few weeks before Jonsson died in 1879. The commentary for these years is fairly complete excepting for portions of 1869 and the entire year of 1877. The population of Röra, which numbered 1 663 persons in 1860, had grown to 1 769 in 1870 and to 1 777 in 1880 (*Bohusläns historia* 1963, p 324). Jonsson's wife died in 1854. Two of his three daughters were married to farmers on nearby farms. However, Anna Britta, his third daughter, lived on her father's farm during this entire period. Jonsson worked actively as a farmer for the whole of his life but this work was shared between the years 1867 and 1873 with Olle Olsson, the half-owner [meaning that he received half of the profits from the farm], and his family. Anna Britta married the farmer Per Olausson in 1873. He then shared Prästbacka farm with his father-in-law.

A discovery of this kind is of great interest to a cultural historian, providing as it does information about lifestyles, social life, the conceptual world and, at best, both personal experiences and reflections on a small coastal farm. It relates to an age far earlier than when fieldwork commonly began being conducted in the form of interviews, observations and photographing. Jonsson's sources of information consist firstly of his own visual and oral observations on the farm and its surroundings, including the local church. In addition, they involve oral narratives from his own parish and, to some extent, from neighbouring parishes. A third source of information consists of what he has read in the regional newspaper, *Bohusläns Tidning*, and in *Svenska Weckobladet*, a journal published in Stockholm between 1869 and 1895. This last source provided Jonsson with information about events in the world at large.

Diaries comprise a significant qualitative source for a previous age whose other source materials, such as parish registers, tax rolls etc, are predominantly quantitative. I might add that I discuss the methodological issues relating to the scientific usage of peasant diaries in a separate paper. The quantitative source materials utilized in this paper consist of parish registers of deaths and burials from Röra.



Map of the island Orust in western Sweden. The map was drawn by Kirsten Berrum, Oslo, Norway.

In 2007 Jonsson's diaries became public property after being presented to the Bohuslän Museum in Uddevalla. They have also been made available for future research by having been published in two volumes printed in 1991 and 1997 (*Jakob Jonssons dagbok.* 1-2. Röra, 1991 and 1997). When citing these sources, I indicate volume 1 or 2 and the page number or numbers.

In this paper, I have chosen to make a *special study and analysis of those notes made with reference to death and funerals in Röra parish*, and also to investigate if and how the world at large outside this district manifested itself in Jonsson's world of ideas.

I Death's tangible proximity

Jonsson was able to encounter death in a special way due to his living close to the parish church. This meant that he could easily hear whenever the bells were tolled to

A granite gravestone commemorating Jakob Jonsson. His farm Prästbacka can be seen in the background. Photo taken in 2008 by Anders Gustavsson.

mark a death and then note this down in his diaries. He recorded the deceased's name and often the age at death as well as the farm or croft on which the person had lived.

Living near the church allowed Jonsson to observe personally and to record all funerals taking place in the parish on both weekdays and Sundays. As a general rule and in keeping with the customs of the time, the actual *funeral service* was conducted *alongside the grave* and not inside the church (Gustafsson 1950, p 172). Especially prominent persons were the only individuals to be honoured by a funeral service inside the church. This never applied to common farmers but was, however, accorded a young surveyor who died while carrying out official duties in Tegneby parish in 1873 and also a thirty-four-year-old farmer, Johan Henriksson, a Member of Parliament who died in 1867. His funeral service was conducted on 30 December and took place "in the chancel of the church" (vol. 1, p 70).

Surveyor Uddman's funeral service in the church on Sunday 6 June 1873 is described in even greater detail in the diary. It was "conducted with great splendour and solemnity. The coffin had been painted black, flowers and wreathes had been arranged on Saturday evening in the porch where a spruce forest had practically been raised, with 4 or 5 [spruce trees; author's note] alongside the coffin and 3 more in a corner of the porch on the other side of the aisle. Within the temple itself a slightly raised

The Member of Parliament 1865-1867 Johan Henriksson. Photo privately owned.

black podium decorated with white and green flowers and branches had been placed in front of the alter rails near the aisle in the chancel on which the corpse was to be placed for the ceremonial sprinkling of the earth" (vol. 1, p 327). This detailed description of a funeral is the only example found in the diarial material. The young surveyor had recently moved to the village of Henån in Röra parish. Therefore the deceased was not to be buried in Röra but transported to his home district in the town of Kungälv where "the deceased's remains would at last be confined to the earth to moulder away".

Common farmers and crofters from Röra were merely recorded as having been *buried out in the churchyard*. No funeral sermon was preached outdoors since the Swedish Book of Common Prayer, published in 1811 (*Kyrko-Handbok* 1861, p 95), decreed that this was only to be done inside the church. The official report issued in connection with an episcopal visitation in Tegneby parish in 1875 relates that funeral sermons only rarely occurred (GLA GDA FII: 20).

Corpses were carried on a bier from the home to the churchyard but in 1872 an innovation occurred with the introduction of a hearse. Horse-drawn hearses came into general use in Sweden towards the end of the 1800s (Hagberg 1937, p 363). The very first time the hearse was used in Röra was on 23 October 1872 when the widow Louisa Jakobsdotter was buried. Her son, the lay assessor Jakob Torgersson, had constructed the hearse and donated it to the church (vol. 1, p 294).

On 28 May 1874 Jonsson's son-in-law Per Olausson was appointed to have charge of this hearse and make it available to those next-of-kin who needed to use it. The cost for using the hearse was set at 25 *öre*, to be collected by Olausson. The charge for each time it was loaned to another parish was not less than 3 *riksdaler* (vol. 2, p 41) [1 *riksdaler* = 100 *öre*]. On 20 June 1874 the hearse was borrowed for the first time by the

neighbouring parish of Torp (vol. 2, p. 47). On Whit Monday, 17 May 1875, there were two burials in the neighbouring parish of Tegneby; the hearse from Röra was borrowed for use at one of them (vol. 2, p 113).

Although Jonsson noted what took place in connection with the tolling of bells and funerals in almost the entire parish, he mentions the *funeral repast* only in connection with those of his closest relatives and neighbours. This is a natural consequence of these being the only occasions on which he participated in the gathering in the home. Before the day of the funeral, it was necessary to have baked and cleaned

The horse-drawn hearse outside Röra church at a burial in 1921. Photo privately owned.

and to have arranged for the necessary food for the meal. Fish appears to have been an especially important item of food among farmers in this coastal community. Procuring fish often involved having to travel several miles. Several of the half-owner Olle Olsson's children died. On 18 January 1868 a baby girl aged 4 months and 10 days died. On 20 January "Olle went out to the islands to buy fish for the burial of his dead daughter Inger Christina. Not much fish was to be had, and what could be bought was dear. He had had to walk on the ice over Ellös Fjord to Gullholmen" (vol. 1, p 73). Since this was in mid-winter, little fish was available and this greatly raised the price. Fish still had to purchased because it was seen as being essential to the funeral observance. On 20 August 1870 two of Olle Olsson's children died, aged two and six years, in the scarlet fever epidemic that had struck the parish (see below). On 24 August the father went out to Gullholmen to purchase "burial fish" (vol. 1, p 166). On 26 August he travelled to Henån in order to procure snaps which also had to be provided at the funeral observance. So much time had to be used to prepare for the funeral party [here Jonsson uses the word *kalas*, meaning party] that harvest work, then in full swing, was affected. Jonsson was concerned about the harvesting but he realized very well that preparations for the funeral observance took precedence. "The weather is now fairly dry and good for harvesting but we cannot do much work because so much harvesting time must be used for the many tasks to make ready for the funeral meal next Sunday" (vol. 1, p 166).

This involved not only the purchase and preparation of food and beverages but also the two coffins that the children's father had to make at this time in 1870. It was not usual to prepare for the death of children by having coffins made ahead of time as was the case when older people died (Hagberg 1937, p 168). This same Olle Olsson was also forced to arrange a funeral for another child during the following summer. He was once again obliged to go to the fishing village of Grundsund in order to "buy fish for the funeral" (vol. 1, p 220). After the funeral repast on 3 August 1871, he actually received help with his haying from the funeral guests. "Scythes were obtained and after an hour, almost three loads of hay were cut and the first of the natural meadows to be reaped this year was almost cut and harvested". Ordinary farm work always had to be carried out despite the feelings of grief. On the next day, 4 August, Olle Olsson began spreading manure on the fallow field. This was hard work seeing that more than 60 cartloads were spread in two days (vol. 1, p 221). A similar prompt precedence given farm work, despite the death of one of the family's children, is also noted in Danish peasant diaries dated to the 1800s (*Bondedagbøger* 1980, p 27).

II Causes of death

The details noted in Jonsson's diaries provide a good impression of the different causes of death that occurred. There are actually more facts here than in the parish registers for deaths and funerals kept by the local clergyman. 29 people died in Röra parish in 1866, but in only three cases were the causes of death noted down in the register (GLA Röra F 1) despite there being a separate column for this information. During the famine year of 1868 no fewer than 54 people died, among them 24 children, but we learn something about the cause of death in only 11 cases. Jonsson was much better informed. In many instances, he also noted down the circumstances concerning the death, especially if it was caused by accidents or serious epidemics. Such information cannot be found in the parish registers.

Epidemic diseases

Contagious diseases often had an epidemic sequence before vaccinations became common. One such serious epidemic occurred in the summer of 1870. This was *scarlet fever*, a problematic infection of the throat caused by a group-A Streptococcus (www.ne.se Scharlakansfeber). Scarlet fever was in fact the infectious disease that caused the most deaths in Sweden in the latter half of the 1800s. The mortality rate was more than 30% of those infected. According to the parish registers of deaths and funerals, 67 people died in Röra in 1870, 33 of whom died of scarlet fever between 10 May and 6 October. These were children ranging in age from three months to 14

A dead child lying in its coffin, photographed in Röra parish in the early twentieth century. Photo privately owned.

years. Only three of them were more than 10 years old (GLA Röra F 1). No cause of death was listed for the other 34 persons who died in this same year.

Several parents lost more than one child in this epidemic. On 31 August Jonsson mentions the farmer Anders Larsson from Rämmedalen "whose two [youngest] children have died and will be placed in the same grave next Sunday" (vol. 1, p 167). On 10 and 12 September two of the parish clerk Carl Fredriksson's children died. This family also lived on Rämmedalen farm. The half-owner Olle Olsson lost three children in the weeks between 20 August and 11 September. It is almost impossible to conceive of the anxiety and grief that must have been felt everywhere in the countryside during these dramatic months. Jonsson gives us glimpses of his feelings of grief at the same time as he describes difficult and quite lengthy incidents of the disease. Some of his grandchildren were among those afflicted by extreme suffering and later death. On Sunday 24 July prayers were offered in the church "both before and after the services for [his son-in-law] Abraham's eldest daughter from Göksäter farm who had lain abed for a long time". She died two days later on 26 July (vol. 1, p 160). Jonsson noted that she "had suffered a great swelling on each side of her head near her ears that then burst open on the surface of the left side and within the head on the right" (vol. 1, p 162). On 6 August he wrote that "nearly all the children in my half-owner Olle's family are sick, which sickness began for them and in other cases with a swelling in the throat – Olle's youngest boy is now so sick that his survival is in doubt, the worst and most difficult cases are the smallest ones, as they won't swallow any medicine because they don't understand that it will make them well, though those who have tried it have been helped (vol. 1, p 163). On 29 August Olle Olsson visited the doctor to get help for his eldest daughter Matilda. She died, however, on 11 September after having been bedridden for two months.

Another serious disease that afflicted many people in Röra was *nerve fever*. This is an obsolete name for typhus caused by an aggressive salmonella bacterium. It causes inflammation in the walls of the small intestine before spreading through the body and the blood (www.ne.se Nervfeber). Unlike scarlet fever, it is not a childhood disease. The aforementioned Member of Parliament Johan Henriksson died of typhus in 1867. In early July of 1871, Jonsson's daughter Anna Britta, who lived with him at home, caught this disease. He realized that there was an immediate danger to her life since he wrote that it is "such a grave illness that it will either end her mortal life, or otherwise, as has been the case with other such patients, cause her to lie abed for a very long time and also be very weak for the whole of her lifetime". He notes that he feels "great distress" because of this occurrence of the disease and that "it is almost more than I can bear" (vol. 1, p 217). His half-owner Olle Olsson is sent three times to Henån to fetch the district medical officer and then to the apothecary to get medicine. The farm's servant girl Maria Larsdotter had also been infected with this disease.

On 23 July Jonsson noted down that his daughter Anna Britta's serious illness continued "and does not seem to show the least sign of betterment nor of worsening, but she is not, praise God, so strongly tormented that she either raves or is in anguish, but yet cannot sleep or eat" (vol. 1, p 218). Olle Olsson's servant girl Maria had made a quicker recovery and had left her bed by late July. It was, however, not until 16 August that Jonsson could declare that his daughter Anna Britta, after her six-week-long illness, had become "so much improved that she will try to manage without having extra help in the house" (vol. 1, p 223). On Sunday 27 August he was able to rejoice and to praise God because his daughter once again could take part in the church service after having been prevented from doing so for eight Sundays (vol. 1, p 225).

According to the parish register for deaths and funerals, this disease had killed a number of people. Jonsson does not, however, discuss what happened at other places in the parish but concentrates instead on his daughter's illness. Its result could just as well have been her death as the recovery which later gave him happiness.

Lengthy illnesses that finally resulted in death

Although Jonsson was especially concerned with the epidemic diseases that ravaged his community, he also described some cases of people dying after a long and gruelling period of illness. On 16 July 1878, the church bells were tolled for a crofter's daughter "who had been plagued with falling sickness for a period of twenty years" (vol. 2, p 271). This is an obsolete name for epilepsy (www.ne.se Fallandesot). On 2 February 1879 the bells were tolled for "a dead needy woman", 39 years of age. She had become blind as a result of smallpox, an epidemic disease characterized by pustules on the skin and the mucous membranes (www.ne.se Smittkoppor). After recovering from this disease, she had became a pauper forced to wander from farm to farm and been nicknamed "Blind Johanna" (vol. 2, p 328). A woman was buried on 1 March 1878 after having been bedridden for about seven years due to "a quite strange indisposition". This illness consisted of her being "so vexed by shivering or shaking that she could not eat or drink without help from others". Jonsson comments that "her unrest is now completely stilled". Death had freed her from this dreadful misery. He had heard that "her shivering had ceased towards the end" (vol. 2, p 248, 250).

Accidents

Accidents are one category of causes of death that are often mentioned in Jonsson's memorandums. *Deaths by drowning* are mentioned specially. Such accidents could just as well occur in ponds or rivers near the victim's home as out on the open sea. Fatal accidents close to the home often involved children who drowned in a nearby pond. Peat-holes were a danger to both humans and animals. On 28 July "the four-

teen-year-old daughter to Johannes Samuelsson of Granbua was buried. The girl had drowned accidently in a peat-hole" (vol. 1, p 333).

Röra being a coastal parish, sea bathing during the summer was just as hazardous as ice-fishing during the winter. In early August of 1868 it was noted that "the youth Calle Jonasson" had "drowned near Morlanda mill's dock while swimming or bathing in the open sea" (vol. 1, p 101). This occurred during the very warm summer when drought caused crop failure, as Jonsson painstakingly described. On 1 April 1876 the church bells were tolled for a fifteen-year-old boy who "had gone through the ice and drowned quite close to land as he was walking to or from fishing" (vol. 2, p 176). In the parish registers for deaths and funerals, these two youths were noted only as having drowned with no additional information being given.

In Jonsson's day there were over a hundred registered seamen working on various cargo vessels (GLA Röra kyrkoarkiv). Several of them died at sea. Jonsson was especially concerned about one of them, a young man who had previously worked on his farm at Prästbacka. On 24 April 1878 he recorded the following detailed and emotional description. "To-day the bells have tolled for a young man from Röra parish named Isak Johansson who worked for us a few years ago and who was well-behaved and respectable, loyal and hard-working. He decided to go to sea despite the fact that his then living mother and relations tried to dissuade him. He said his strongest motive for doing this was that he would then escape the hardship of military training at Backamo, but what happened? He signed on with a captain from Skaftö, but on the third day after sailing from home port to England he was washed overboard and could not be saved" (vol. 2, p 265). The parish death and funeral register notes that the farmhand Isak Johansson, 21 years old, had drowned but gives no further details (GLA Röra F 1).

Other causes of fatal accidents were those in which a person *had been killed*. On 3 January 1879 "the bells were tolled for the widower Mattias Andersson from Rämmedalen who had died in the evening of the same day after falling from the stair of the room onto the stone floor of the kitchen" (vol. 2, p 323). The register over deaths and funerals provides the information that Andersson was a widower and 70 years of age but nothing as to how he had died.

Traffic accidents could occur even before the age of the automobile. On 3 July 1873 the bells were tolled for the wife of the crofter Johan Svensson who worked on Röd farm, "whose death appears to have been caused by being run over as she walked from church on Midsummer Day". On 6 July 1873 "was buried the victim who was so badly injured after being run over that death followed 10 days after the event"(vol. 1, s 329). In the parish register, this woman is noted as having been 64 years old and having died "as a result of a collision?" The question mark is actually written in the register of deaths, something that seems to indicate that the clergyman did not know

the exact facts of the fatal accident. Jonsson had heard rumours that the "man responsible, Abraham Samuelsson from Museröd, had given in settlement" a considerable economic compensation to the victim's husband and children (vol. 1, p 329). An oral tradition concerning this serious accident lived on in the parish for many years. The local historian Torvald Johansson, born in 1928 and residing at Röd farm, has written about what has been re-told. The widower Johan Svensson is supposed to have been extremely distressed by this accident and begun to doubt the righteousness of God about which he previously had been so confident (Johansson 2004, p 172ff).

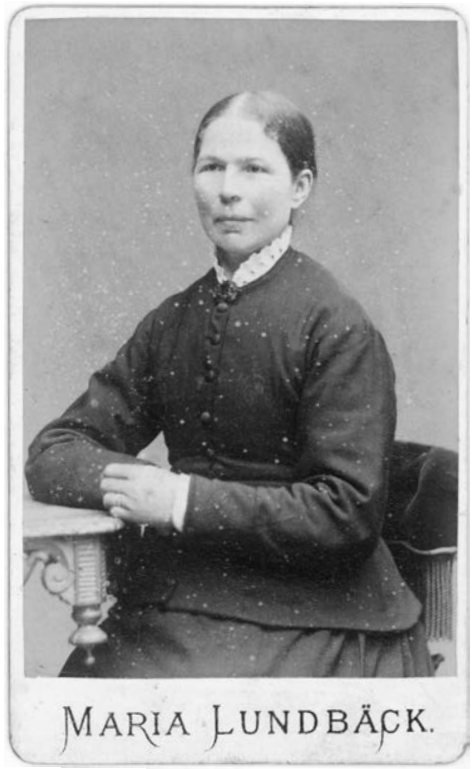
Childbirth and confinement

Childbirth was a life-threatening occurrence in nineteenth-century society. It could prove immensely hazardous for both mother and child. Jonsson has noted down several cases of lives being lost in this connection.

It was not unusual for *women to die in childbirth*. Jonsson recorded the extremely difficult social situations that could occur in homes where this took place. On 9 September 1874 the bells were tolled for a woman who had borne two living children who were christened on 6 September. Jonsson writes of the challenging social conditions for the surviving family: "even more serious because the husband is a sailor far off in foreign lands and the children must be cared for by relatives" (vol. 2, p 65). In the 1870s there were several cases of women having died after medical procedures in connection with childbirth. On 31 August 1875 the bells were tolled for a wife who had died "after the assistant district doctor had pulled the child out with the help of an instrument". Jonsson comments on this by using the words "quite sad" (vol. 2, p 136). A similar case is mentioned in June of 1875 and another in March of 1878, but the parish register of deaths and funerals notes only that these two women died in connection with childbirth.

The medical profession was highly esteemed by Jonsson as is clearly indicated by his description of a doctor's unexpected death in Henån on 7 February 1875. This was some months before the aforementioned women died so tragically in childbirth. Jonsson writes of this doctor named Dalin as "one who had long aided the hand of the Highest in curing and relieving sickness among others" (vol. 2, p 92). The medical profession is thus seen in a religious context, something that typifies Jonsson's outlook on life. Dalin, who was not buried in Röra but instead in his original home district of Stockholm, was succeeded by Doctor Phil who carried out the deliveries that had ended so tragically (*Från vår bygd* V, 1973, p 64).

There were a number of cases of s*tillborn children*. On 17 March 1872 "the third stillborn child this year was buried in Röra churchyard", and Jonsson characterizes this with the word "remarkable" (vol. 1, p 253). He even experienced the birth of a



Jakob Jonssons oldest daughter Inger Christina born in 1831. She bore a stillborn child in 1876 when she was 45 years old. Photo privately owned.

stillborn child in his own family. His eldest daughter Inger Christina from the neighbouring farm of Kärra bore a stillborn child on 11 February 1876 when she was 45 years old. Jonsson was, however, able to report with joy and satisfaction that "the birth was over very quickly, thanks be to God, and before the midwife arrived, although she had been sent for in good time – the mother is not markedly weak, according to what I have been told" (vol. 2, p 164). In connection with the child's burial, a gathering was held in the home. On 18 February the child's father came to Prästbacka to invite them to the funeral on the following Sunday. Jonsson's servant girl, Fina, was sent to the house of mourning at Kärra on 19 February "to help with the scrubbing and other cleaning for the next day's burial for the stillborn child".

According to the Swedish *Kyrko-Handbok* [Book of Common Prayer] published in 1811, the funeral service for stillborn children was conducted in a simpler form (*Kyrko-Handbok* 1861, p 99). The ceremonial sprinkling of the earth as well as the Lord's Prayer and the Benediction were maintained but not the tolling of the bells or the other prayers and biblical quotations which were read at ordinary funerals (Pleijel 1983, p 113). Swedish canonic law differentiated between stillborn children whose funeral took this form and "imperfect or aborted foetus" which were not to have any form of funeral ceremony at all but were to be buried in secret in the churchyard (Wåhlin 1841, p 138). Funeral services for stillborn children ceased after Jonsson's day and are not commented upon in Louise Hagberg's comprehensive study from 1937 on popular customs in connection with death and interment (Hagberg 1937, p 510). The stillborn were instead secretly buried by the child's father in a family grave in the churchyard. The portrayer of folk life Carl Gustaf Bernhardson (1915-1998) from the coastal community of Grundsund used this as the subject of a painting based

on childhood memories of when the body of his stillborn brother, encased in a tiny wooden coffin, was carried to the churchyard one evening in 1923.

Suicide

Although disease, accidents and childbirth were the most frequent causes of death, a number of suicides also occurred. One incidence which filled Jonsson with deep commiseration occurred on 12 September 1867. Just after the happy celebration of the christening of the half-owner Olle Olsson's daughter, Jonsson was called on by one of his crofters. This man gave him "the mournful and heartbreaking news that his housekeeper, the spinster Christina Olsdotter, had taken her own life by choking or hanging herself with a cloth wrapped around a beam in the kitchen" (vol. 1, p 57). In this case, Jonsson does not merely communicate narratives about events but also allows for an obvious emergence of his sentiments. This is not customary in peasant diaries from the 1800s. The historian Britt Liljewall comments on "the almost absolute lack of reflections, emotions and deliberations" in such peasant diaries, in contrast to the diaries from bourgeois settings that she has studied. She believes that this reduces opportunities for using peasant diaries to clarify attitudes and norms (Liljewall 1995, p 32f). Jonsson's experiences, on the other hand, most often cannot be misinterpreted. This increases the importance of his diaries.

In other instances of suicide in the parish Jonsson also expressed his emotions. He used the words "how tragic it is" when reporting that the former boatswain Abraham Strömberg had taken his life on 23 December 1871 "by hanging himself in his barn at Museröd farm" (vol. 1, p 239). On 10 July of the following year, Jonsson had an additional opportunity to ponder and lament because it is "both very grievous and strange that during a short period of time, no less than four persons, one man and three women, from Röra parish have taken their own lives by hanging themselves" (vol. 1, p 278). On this particular day one of these three women, a 25-year-old housewife living in Henån community was buried "like a stillborn child". According to the Swedish *Kyrko-Handbok* [Book of Common Prayer] from 1811, this indicates a simpler form for burial service, in silence and without the tolling of the church bells (cf. Hagberg 1937, p 503). This was also prescribed in the canonic law, the latest version of which had been stipulated in a Royal Ordinance on 14 June 1864 (*Sveriges kyrkolag kyrkolag 1864*, Pleijel 1983, p 22). "That whosoever shall have slain himself shall be interred in silence in the churchyard". The parish register for deaths and funerals notes that the deceased was "buried in silence".

III Preparations prior to death

One way in which relatives and friends could prepare themselves for an approaching death was *to visit seriously ill persons.* Jonsson did this even after he himself had become aged and found it difficult to walk towards the end of his life. On 4 June 1871 he visited "those two old people Berndt Hansson and his wife Kjerstin at Lilla Röra who are both so frail, especially the husband, that I cannot believe I will ever again see him alive" (vol. 1, p 210). This man, who had been confirmed on the same day as Jonsson, died some days later on 13 June.

Another preparation for death was that the local parson was summoned to the afflicted person's home to administer the Holy Communion. The traditional term for such visitation was *sockenbud* (Fallberg-Sundmark 2008). One did not have to be approaching death in order to send for the parson; it was enough that one had difficulty in reaching the church, especially in one's old age. Jonsson was himself the recipient of Holy Communion in his home more than once during the last years of his life. In an official report from Tegneby parish for 1875, visitations were stated to have been made primarily to the elderly who were unable to come to church (GLA FII: 20). This applied to people from every social class, including the most poverty-stricken. On 29 November 1874 the pauper Mallena Andersdotter was buried. She had lodged with the farmer Johannes Andersson at Rämmedalen and had been visited by the parson three days before she died (vol. 2, p 78).

IV The social and emotional consequences of death

Jonsson noted down all the deaths that occurred in the parish regardless of *social status*. This applied to both farmers and crofters as well as to the paupers who were sent from farm to farm for lodging. If the mother or father of a large family died, a social problem arose for their relatives, something that Jonsson usually commented on in exactly the same way that he did about pregnant women who died in childbirth (see above). On 21 February 1868 the bells were tolled for "a young man, namely the crofter Johannes Samuelsson from Kallemyr under the farm Lilla Röra, who left a family of five already living children in addition to a wife in the last stages of pregnancy, so that it now seems likely that the parish will have to take on the full support of 7 persons" (vol. 1, p 76). A family thus affected would experience both profound grief and an extremely difficult economic situation. When the bells were tolled on 29 January 1871 for a girl from a poverty-stricken home at the farm Brattås, Jonsson was moved to express his sympathy with such people's exposed situation. "It is quite sad to think of the many paupers who live in their tiny huts with a lack or want of the bare necessities. May God help them" (vol. 1, p 188). The only help Jonsson could give were his prayers.

The parson on a visit to the sick man lying in the bed. Painting by the folklife-artist Carl Gustaf Bernhardson. Bohuslän Museum, no. 513.

Jonsson's sympathy did not only apply to paupers but also to other social categories of people who were struck with grief, such as parents who lost children either as babies or as grown persons. On 30 June 1878 the bells were tolled for a young 21-year-old man from the farm Nedre Häröd. He was "his father's only son and died of consumption as had his two sisters" (vol. 2, p 282). After his funeral on 7 July Jonsson noted the words "great regret and grief" (vol. 2, p 283).

As a result of epidemic diseases, accidents and stillborn children, there was a *high rate of child mortality*. Many parents suffered the loss of more than one child, often within a short space of time. On 20 January 1876 the bells were tolled for a crofter's child who was "the third child who has been borne from this house in a short time" (vol. 2, p 160). On 28 May the bells were tolled for the second child of Anton Olsson at Skredseröd farm "so now the two are as close together in the grave as they were in life" (vol. 1, p 151f). Jonsson also noted down when grown persons from the

same family, for example spouses or parents and children, died shortly after one another. On 19 December 1870 the bells were tolled for a boy "whose father was buried yesterday – great and deeply felt sorrow for the surviving wife who so quickly has lost both husband and son (vol. 1, p 180). One cannot underrate Jonsson's sympathy for the widow who met with such grief in so short a period of time. The frequency of deaths can be comprehended quantitatively in the parish register of deaths and funerals; in Jonsson's notes, however, one can also find comments on social consequences and emotions.

At the same time as the rate of child mortality was high, *many new children were born* to parents who had lost one or more children due to disease or accident. On 21 May 1871 Jonsson's eldest daughter Inger Christina bore a healthy little girl (vol. 1, p 207). The girl died, however, on 6 March of the following year 1872 (vol. 1, p 251). On 5 June 1873 this same daughter of Jonsson's bore "a healthy lad" (vol. 1, p 326). The farm's half-owner Olle Olsson and his wife lost two children due to scarlet fever on the same day, 20 August 1870, and an additional child on 11 September 1870 (see above). On 28 July 1871 the bells were tolled for their newborn little girl (vol. 1, p 219). In the next year too, on 23 November 1873, Olle Olsson's wife bore a little boy (vol. 1, p 296).

V The death of farm animals

Jonsson's sympathy was not only extended to members of his family and other parishioners, but also concerned the animals he owned and was responsible for. He has obviously felt a deep solidarity with them as is shown in his descriptions of their deaths. On 8 April 1878 his son-in-law Per Olausson was forced to put down a ewe that had borne a living lamb but whose "afterbirth had fastened itself to the guts and could not be removed". Jonsson commented on this as being "fairly odd" because he had lost a newborn lamb the day before although the ewe survived. He noted with sorrow and loss that "for my part I now own no other living creatures than a lamb-less sheep and a motherless lamb" (vol. 2, p 261). This lamb was taught to drink milk from a cup and it flourished until 5 May when it suddenly and unexpectedly died. Jonsson speaks of this as "my loss of sheep" when he noted that "the suckling lamb that we had fostered for a while" had died. It had been "plump and good-sized and friendly" (vol. 2, p 268). The word friendly indicates that Jonsson did not think first of all of the economic aspect but rather of a psychological experience of the loss of something he himself was fond of. Only a few days later, on 20 May, he received word that one of the two ewes that he had sent to pasture with a boatswain in Stala parish, had drowned in a peat-hole, something that caused him great sorrow. He then had the other ewe brought back home along with the two lambs that the ewes had borne (vol. 2, p 272).

In September of that same year of 1878 a new problem arose for Jonsson. This time it concerned a young boar about six months old. Until then it had been "healthy and happy" but had suddenly stopped both eating and drinking. It simply lay quietly for the most part while Jonsson observed with a certain satisfaction that it "did not seem to have much pain". His son-in-law Per Olausson tried to pour warm milk into its mouth without success. Jonsson then decided that the boar "seems content to die". He believed that he could interpret its emotions, and therefore it was decided to slaughter the boar. The blood was thrown away but the meat was taken care of (vol. 2, p 306).

When an old mare had to be put down in 1876, his son-in-law Per Olausson contacted a "horse-knacker", Anders Trana who lived at a croft on the farm Fundeskärr, to have this done. The knacker had his son lead the horse to his croft while alive because he wanted to save the meat for his own use. Horsemeat was not eaten by farmers at that time (see Egardt 1962). In the afternoon of that same day, 25 November 1876, the knacker himself came back with the horsehide and the bones and "asked for one *riksdaler* as a fee for his work" (vol. 2, p 229f). Animal and fish bones were ground up in Jonsson's mill for use as fertilizer, something that Jonsson often refers to in his notes. Jonsson tells of the slaughtering of the horse but does not express any emotion or personal commentary. This can be due to the horse being simply an "old nag" that was no longer viable or fit for work. Nor did Jonsson drive a horse in his old age; this was done by the son-in-law Per. He did, however, have close contact with the smaller animals such as sheep and pigs whose death he described more emotionally.

Jonsson also expressed remorse when other farmers lost animals because of accident. In connection with the burning down of a cowshed at Dandalen farm on the night between 14 and 15 January 1873, he wrote: "alas, many animals, 4 horses, several cows and 7 sheep were lost and not one single animal was saved" (vol. 1, p 304). He was obviously thinking both about the animals' terrible fate and the owner's economic loss.

VI The churchyard

The churchyard grass grew high. This *grass was also to be preserved* and used as fodder for the animals. An auction was therefore held every summer for this grass. Jonsson noted down every year just who bought the standing grass and what price was paid. Being a very cost-conscious person, he noted whether the price could be considered high, reasonable or low. On 19 July 1870 Jonsson's crofter Andreas Backman bought the grass being auctioned off for a price that was considered low, but "was still no bargain because the grass in the churchyard was badly trampled down due to the many funeral ceremonies" (vol. 1, p 159). This was the summer when the scarlet

fever epidemic was especially harsh in Röra. This led to many deaths among children and, consequently, to many burials (see above).

Memorials to the deceased raised in the churchyard consisted of wooden crosses, iron crosses or stones. The earliest gravestones were made of limestone, some few of which dating to the mid-1800s still can be found in Röra churchyard. One of the preserved iron crosses was raised to commemorate Johannes Henriksson, the Member of Parliament who died in 1867. The English version of the Swedish text shown on the cross was taken from Psalms 144: 4 which was also used by the parson as the basis for his funeral sermon: "Man is like to vanity, his days are as a shadow that passeth away". This refers only to the transitoriness of life and not to the bliss of life after death. At the very bottom of the cross, however, is depicted an angel holding a triumphal wreath. This must be a symbol of life after death. The same thing can be said about the old Christian symbols of faith, hope and charity pictured as a cross, an

An iron cross commemorating the Member of Parliament Johan Henriksson who died in 1867. Photo taken in 2008 by Anders Gustavsson.

anchor and a heart intermingled in each other. We can see that symbol at the top of the ironcross.

The first granite gravestones began appearing in the 1870s, a period marking the very start of the craft of stonemasonry in Bohuslän (*Bohusläns historia* 1963, p 405f). Jonsson noted in June of 1872 that his half-owner Olle Olsson had reached an agreement with the heirs of a married couple who had both died in 1871, to "raise a costly memorial stone of granite" (vol. 1, p 271). This gravestone still stands in the churchyard. The text from Psalms 39: 5 to which reference is made on the stone is as follows: "Behold, thou hast made my days as a handbreadth; mine age is as nothing before thee: verily every man at his best state is altogether vanity". Again we perceive an equally dark and transitory image as that evoked by the iron cross raised over the Member of Parliament Johannes Henriksson. Thoughts of transitoriness seem to deviate from the heirs erecting so large and costly a gravestone, something that was

A granite gravestone commemorating Gustaf Andersson and his wife Johanna, who both died in 1871 without any children. Photo taken in 2008 by Anders Gustavsson.

completely innovative in that day. The deceased would at least be remembered by posterity thanks to the magnificent gravestone that was raised in their honour.

VII Deaths outside the local district

Deaths in the fishing villages

Even though Jonsson lived in an inland community on the island of Orust, it was only a few miles to the fishing villages on western Orust and Skaftö Islands. Regular contacts were necessary so that the peasant populace could acquire the fish that was an important part of their diet. This provides a background for understanding Jonsson's concern for and anxiety about the fishermen who were exposed to great peril during fierce storms out on the open sea. On 28 March 1878 he informs us that a severe storm has raged all day and night. However difficult it was for the people of Röra, it was worse "on the sea for our poor coastal people, since they are usually out at sea to carry out their fishing. Oh, that it might end well for them, at least no worse than that they might lay at anchor and thus be saved. ... The future will show or tell those living what the outcome has been, we commend them with heartfelt prayers unto the mild mercy of Providence, we can do no more to aid them" (vol. 2, p 256f). Religion is thus shown to be an obvious element in the principles of daily life. A trust in God provides security for Jonsson and also a counterweight to his anxiety.

A strong easterly wind continued to blow on 30 March in that year of 1878, leading Jonsson to write: "It is most worrying to think of those wretched fishermen who have gone out to sea" (vol. 2, p 257). Such anxiety was in fact very logical because many boats were lost in connection with the deep-sea fishing that started up around 1860. Conditions did not improve until the early 1890s when the fishermen of Bohuslän acquired English cutters outfitted with motors instead of sails (Hasslöf 1949). On Easter Eve, 20 April 1878, Jonsson received word that "the deep-sea fishing boats from Grundsund and Gullholmen have all luckily arrived home safely with large catches of fish, and without suffering from the bad weather on the fishing grounds caused by the strong easterly winds that lasted several weeks and led to great anxiety, because the boats and their crews had found safe harbour in Norway where they had stayed for all of 5 weeks, but well that they were there because otherwise they would have perished on the fishing grounds" (vol. 2, p 264). Jonsson could heave a sigh of relief and feel that the mercy of Providence had manifested itself in a way he could not have foretold, but for which he had indeed hoped.

During the summer and fall of 1866 an epidemic of *cholera* raged in Sweden. This is a bacterial stomach disease with diarrhoea and vomiting, and with a mortality rate of about 50% (www.ne.se Kolera). Röra was relatively untouched by this epi-

demic but the disease raged fiercely in Gothenburg (Fredberg 1 1921, p 475). It arrived there on 25 June 1866 on foreign ships. 1 237 people became ill and 638 of these died. On 9 October the epidemic was considered to have ended (Arvidsson 1972, p 87). The disease had also ravaged several coastal districts of Bohuslän, among these the fishing village of Gullholmen with which Jonsson's family had frequent contact in order to buy fish (see above). In Rönnäng, a fishing village on Tjörn Island close to Orust, 55 people died during September (www.tjsf.org based on Rönnäng's parish register for deaths and funerals). The author Olof Hansson, who was born in 1914, relates in his book *Min barndom på Gullholmen* ["My childhood on Gullholmen"] the tales told by his maternal grandparents, who were about thirteen years old in 1866. They "spoke of how terrible it was; about how frightened everyone was. No-one knew in the morning just what had happened during the night. People lay sick in nearly every house, and 36 of them lost their lives. Many were panic-stricken, and in one house a woman had locked herself in for fear of being infected. ... She was still one of the first victims" (Hansson 1983, p 45).

Jonsson reported towards the end of August in this year that cholera was "very serious in certain places, especially in the fishing village of Gullholmen". The infection was believed to have been brought there by village people who had visited the St Laurentius' Mass market in Gothenburg on 10 August (vol. 1, p 25. See Skarin-Frykman 1993 for more information on this market). It should be pointed out that women from Gullholmen were famous for travelling by boat to Gothenburg during the summer to sell the fish caught by their husbands. The St Laurentius' Mass market was an important occasion for the sale of fish (Hasslöf 1949, p 396).

A man from Röra, then in Gothenburg, died in late August 1866 (vol. 1, p 26). On 28 August a twenty-three-year-old crofter's daughter from Röra died of cholera on Gullholmen, according to a certificate issued by the parish clerk of the district (GLA F 1 Röra). On 1 September the first and only death occurred in Röra parish itself. This was a crofter's wife aged 72, and Jonsson noted that the "infection was brought by a person who came there from Gullholmen" (vol. 1, p 27). In early September Jonsson reported on "double sorrow and unrest, not only because of unsuitable and hopeless harvest weather" in the local Röra area but also because "the raging sickness cholera is now so widespread that all trading journeys between the towns especially Gothenburg and the coast must cease almost entirely – in some place completely" (vol. 1, p 27). On Gullholmen "three deadly fevers now rage".

Jonsson observed the situation for the coastal population outside his own district with unease and deep concern. He wrote: "It seems as if all these unfortunate or pitiful coastal dwellers are to keep one another company in eternity at one and the same time – we must see how long the murdering angel is allowed to harry or how wide-

ranging and far-reaching are his orders to slay". This is the only occasion in which Jonsson uses the word "eternity" as a perspective on death, which is to say as a conception of an existence after death. He also uses a religious interpretation in speaking of a murdering angel that is sent out to slay. This conception goes back to accounts in the Old Testament concerning the Israelites' exodus from Egypt (www.ne.se Mordängel). On 26 October Jonsson was gratefully able to verify: "Thanks be to God that the cholera sickness has generally and clearly lessened in the towns and fishing villages where it has been most serious" (vol. 1, p 30). The religious interpretation of situations concerning diseases and their cure makes itself clearly felt here as a lodestar for Jonsson's world of ideas. He was not only a diligent church-goer on Sundays – providing he was not hindered by illness or bad weather – but the Christian world of ideas also characterized his daily life and aided him by providing mental resources in the face of various crisis situations.

The deaths of Royal personages

Jonsson made a note of when kings and queens died and were buried. The first occasion was the death of Queen Wilhelmina-Lovisa in 1871 at 43 years of age. The different farms in Röra parish were then all obliged to take their turn at tolling the bells for eight days. Jonsson reported in 1871 that it was the neighbouring farm of Kärra which was responsible for the tolling, and that next time it would be the turn of his farm Prästbacka (vol. 1, p 201). When the 70-year-old Queen Mother Josephina Maximiliana Eugenia died in 1876 it was, however, officially decreed that the bells throughout the realm would toll for only four days. This was because she was not a reigning queen (Bringéus 1958, p 233ff).

The greatest attention Jonsson paid to the Royal family was in connection with the demise of King Carl XV on 18 September 1872 at 46 years of age. For the King the bells were to be tolled for twenty days until the day of the funeral ceremony on 9 October. His death was announced in Röra church on Sunday 20 September. The sermon held by rector Johannes Sörman that day was based on the text "How Christian subjects should behave (or reflect) when confronted with the grave of their Monarch" (vol. 1, p 294). In addition to the announcement in the church, Jonsson based his accounts on what he read in the journal *Svenska Weckobladet*. Among details reported in the journal, according to his notes, approximately 30 000 people had viewed the King as he lay in state. On 9 October 1872 the following could be read in this journal: "Nearly 30 000 persons are thought to have availed themselves of the permission to view the Royal corpse". As a final commentary on 1872, Jonsson copied the entire funeral sermon held by Bishop Bring at the King's funeral ceremony (vol. 1, p 301f) and which is cited in *Svenska Weckobladet* for 16 October 1872.

War and death

Among foreign affairs marked by death, Jonsson noted down what he had read in the *Svenska Weckobladet* about various states of war. He was especially concerned with the Franco-Prussian War of 1870-1871 (www.ne.se Fransk-tyska kriget) in which unprecedented numbers of lives were lost. He wrote about this war with great sympathy, also expressing his disgust over the immense suffering it caused for the afflicted peoples. He appears to be an obvious advocate of peace who was absorbed by events taking place in the greater world and for the well-being of other people there. He was obviously happy when peace was negotiated between Prussia and France in the early spring of 1871, just as he was because Sweden had enjoyed a long period of invaluable peace compared to other nations. In late October 1870 he composed a lengthy account of the terrible Franco-Prussian War which he termed "barbaric". He stressed the fact that France, Prussia and Germany "had long fought with and plundered each other most barbarically and still continue, and do not appear to be able to think of peace until they have destroyed one another" (vol. 1, p 176). A peace treaty was eventually negotiated, however, "after they first had plundered each other's property,

King Carl XV as shown in an illustration in the Svenska Weckobladet for 16 October 1872.

namely towns, forests and countryside etc and killed countless numbers of people, only then did they decide to declare peace". France was to pay an enormous war indemnity and also relinquish areas of land. In order to meet the hardships in France, an offering was collected at the altar of Röra church immediately after the conclusion of peace on mid-Lent Sunday 19 March 1871 "to aid in providing seed corn for the deprived, because such a destructive war has raged in France that they lack both foodstuffs and especially seed corn for next spring" (vol. 1 p 197). Solidarity was expressed in this way throughout the parish as Jonsson was able to show to his satisfaction.

In this connection, one can make comparisons with the information given by the itinerant primary school teacher Anna Edman who taught at various farms in Röra parish from 1865 to 1876. She has written about her experiences during this period when she was the only primary school teacher in Röra. In 1870 she travelled to Kungsbacka and reported that "it was just at this time that the war between Germany and France broke out, an event that was talked about wherever one came. Everyone believed that France would triumph". When she later participated in the first Nordic school teachers' conference in Gothenburg, she reported from there: "The war was discussed here, too, and the Danes were so happy that those nasty Germans were going to get a thrashing, but things turned out differently than was expected" (manuscript in Erik Askland's collection, Röra). It should be remembered that in 1864 Denmark had lost the major portion of southern Jutland to the Germans as the result of a peace treaty following a short war. These areas were not returned to Denmark until after the plebiscite of 1920 (*Grænsen* 1995).

VIII Jakob Jonsson's own death

In view of the fact that Jakob Jonsson wrote so much about other people's deaths, one might wonder about his thoughts concerning his own death. He passed away on 15 March 1879, nearly 84 years of age. In a letter dated one year earlier, he writes that "the state of my health is fairly good", but he also realizes that he can be nearing the end of his life as he is now in his 83rd year. This is something that he has not referred to previously despite having shown great interest in other people's deaths both in his own parish and elsewhere. Nonetheless, he feels great faith when facing this fact. "In this as in all my other affairs, I deliver myself into the hands of the Blessed Father. He shall dispose of me as He thinks will be the best". The moment of death is whenever God, as "the Blessed Father", decides. No fear of death is indicated.

A handwritten memorandum describing "father's deathbed" has been preserved. It was probably written by Jonsson's daughter Anna Britta. As written in the text, "he showed no fear of death during his lengthy ordeal". He suffered patiently "even when

distressed by strange thoughts". What these latter may have involved is unknown. His physical pain was apparent, but he has also felt an obvious mental anxiety. Then he turned to God with his prayers, as he had done all his life, and experienced confidence. His daughter wrote that "he appealed to God for deliverance to his fulfilment with heartfelt prayer". This is the same belief that Jonsson himself had expressed earlier. The daughter ends her text with "he was able to feel that the righteous shall be the blessed".

A pair of handwritten memorial tablets were set up in the home after Jonsson's death, as was the common practice for a time after death. One tablet notes the birth- and death-dates of both Jonsson and his wife, with a reference to Psalms 47: 8 stressing God's sublimity: he "sitteth upon the Throne of his holiness", but does not in any way allude to human death. This is shown on the other tablet, however, with Job 19: 25-26 in which it is said "and though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God". There is, in other words, an evident conception of a meeting with God after death.

Another memorial tablet commemorating only Jakob Jonsson not only records his birth- and death-dates but also quotes five handwritten verses with religious content which are, however, not found in the 1819 hymnal. Even though it has not been possible to trace the source of these verses, the conceptions of death that they express can be of interest. The verses are written in the first person with the newly dead Jonsson indicated as speaking in the I-form. The first verse expresses a farewell to children and friends. The deceased commits his soul into God's hands. "As if borne by the wings of angels" the soul rises "free and joyful" up to Heaven. This is described as being a "beautiful city" where there is a "sweet peace". There the deceased shall meet once more those that have died before. Verse 4 refers to the biblical quotation about that which is sown into the earth shall arise again in transfigured form. The body shall be renewed on the Day of Judgement. The deceased expresses a prayer of "let me rise onto Heaven" with reference to his now having "pure and cleansed blood". In this a Christian conviction is very clear. These verses have probably been chosen by Jonsson's daughters, but they surely illustrate a conviction that was prevalent in the home. In this way they can express Jonsson's innermost thoughts despite his never having written about any such conceptions of a life after death in his diaries. He was a down-to-earth person whose religious faith was present at all times. It stood both for all that was permanent in life's different variations, and also allowed for the finding of solutions in both the present and the future.

Concluding line of reasoning

This analysis of Jonssons observations dealing with death and burials has revealed several interesting features. With regard to funeral customs, we have been able to

register not only newer customs, i.e. innovations, but also such customs as have disappeared, i.e. regressions, since Jonsson's day. The replacement of the bier by the hearse was among noticeable innovations. We have been informed of the exact date on which this occurred in Röra in 1872. That same year also marked the occurrence of the first granite gravestone in Röra churchyard. Among regressions are the special funeral ceremony and also the subsequent funeral meal in the home for stillborn children. These are, on the other hand, unknown in the folk traditions of the 1900s. A specific ceremony of this kind for suicides was also something that later ceased. Funeral services for common people were still usually held outdoors in the churchyard and not in the church itself as became the norm during the 1900s. Services inside the church were held only for the most well-known people in Jonsson's day. An obvious social equalization has taken place over time in this regard.

The grass in the churchyard grew unhampered and was not cared for by any churchyard personnel such as we have been accustomed to in later years. Well-scythed churchyards did not occur in the 1800s or even during the early 1900s. Memorials in the churchyard were for the most part wooden crosses along with some iron crosses and a few limestone memorials. The remembrance of the deceased was not maintained physically in the way we have become accustomed to since our gravestones are often made of granite. These came into gradual use during the last years of Jonsson's life.

Jonsson was a man of obvious sentiments and reflections which he did not subdue but instead recorded, allowing posterity to have access to them. He did not merely describe events, as was the most usual in other peasant diaries dated to the 1800s, but also wrote about his thoughts and emotions. He engaged himself not only emotionally but also economically in connection with charitable fund-raising for the most vulnerable in the community or the surrounding world.

Death was not something about which one remained silent but was always a very real part of personal narratives. For Jonsson, this was emphasized by his living near the church and being able to hear the tolling of the bells and the funeral ceremonies out in the churchyard. Epidemics and the many deaths in childbirth contributed to the fact that people could not escape mention of death but had it as an element in their daily lives and a cause of unease and despair. Nor were suicides suppressed but were brought out into full light of day as is shown in the reports that he had heard in the community.

A fundamental religious belief is always present in Jonsson's interpretations of the events of his day and in his thoughts of the future. He surrendered the progress of events into the hands of God; this gave him comfort even when he was greatly distressed. For Jonsson, the future concerned life here on earth.

Jonsson also showed an obvious interest for and involvement in events taking place in the greater world outside the local district. He must have been an early sub-

scriber to the *Svenska Weckobladet* after this journal began being published in Stockholm in 1869. The deaths of Royal personages were among events that were accorded great attention in the realm. War was also an event about which readers of the journal were informed and over which they could be shocked.

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2
Gravestone symbols used during 1990s in Norway and Sweden

Gravestones constitute a physical and lasting expression bearing witness to a person's life after he or she has died. During the last century most people have been given a memorial of this kind even though customs such as anonymous graves in memorial groves or the scattering of ashes in the countryside have become more widespread in the past decades in Sweden (see Åkesson 1997).

In this study I will concentrate on how dissimilarities between Norwegian and Swedish gravestones have been expressed and how one can attempt to explain them on the basis of different conditions in the two countries. I will place the distinctive features of Norwegian and Swedish customs in contrast to one another without, however, dealing with specific regional deviations within the countries. The national level will for the most part have precedence over the regional level, despite the study having been carried out in Norwegian and Swedish regions that verge on one another. Innovation acceptance will be contrasted with the preservation of tradition. Tendencies are studied in which one form of usage is more common in the one country than in the other, without, however, any determination of the exact degree of difference. This is in the nature of qualitative analysis.

Background

In a research project "Symbols of death", started in 2000, concerning pictural symbols and epitaphs on gravestones in Norway and Sweden and also objects, such as bronze figurines, fastened to gravestones, my focus has been on the 1990s. During this decade customs have become markedly changed in several respects. This is shown by the use of new pictural symbols and by the frequent placement of objects, with or without inscriptions, in front of the gravestones together with flowers. Other innovations that have made their appearance involve texts written on paper inserted into plastic coverings or painted on separate, smaller stones.

The object of the aforementioned project is to interpret the pictures, epitaphs and objects as symbols and expressions for human sentiments, thoughts and ideas. How

1. The map shows localities and towns where fieldwork has been carried out in connection with the project "Symbols of death". Fieldwork in cities has taken place in several different cemeteries. The map was drawn by Torill Sand, Oslo.

has an increasing individualization in society as a whole been expressed on gravestones? No attempts have been made to carry out quantitative evaluation; instead, a qualitative selection has been assembled through photographs of both innovative and traditional images and epitaphs in cemeteries. Observations recorded during fieldwork have given a satisfactory illustration of characteristic and deviatory aspects in these cemeteries.

In this study I have emphasized the aspect of individualization. The individualistic aspect of death has in later years become more widespread in both Norway and Sweden, as has been shown by several cultural researchers (see Alver & Skjelbred 1994, Tanggaard 1994, Larsén 2000, cf. also Gwyndaf 1999 for Wales). This tendency is no longer restricted to the highest social classes only.

The geographical starting point of the study consists of some seventy selected cemeteries in an area ranging from Göteborg, Sweden, to Oslo, Norway, both in cities and rural districts, along the coast and in inland agricultural and forested regions. In Sweden this concerned numerous parishes in the province of Bohuslän, in Norway portions of Østfold County as well as the cities of Oslo and Sandefjord (see map). In several instances these are areas in which I have previously carried out fieldwork on other projects. This has given me a good deal of prior information on the religious and social character of the regions in question. The cities in which I have carried out fieldwork are Göteborg, Kungälv, Uddevalla, Lysekil and Strömstad in Sweden and Sandefjord, Halden, Fredrikstad, Sarpsborg and Oslo in Norway.

The source material used consists of photographs, observation and interviews with family members as well as with stonecutters and cemetery personnel. Comparisons have been made between recurrent usage in Norway and Sweden. How are similarities indicated between the two countries and what constitutes the lines of demarcation not only concerning customs in the cemeteries but also in national legislation and local regulations? The present study has been part of a research collaboration between the Universities of Oslo and Göteborg. Collaboration has also existed between the University of Oslo and the Ecomuseum Gränsland ("Boundary region") which has operated in the region adjoining the national boundary in Bohuslän, Dalsland and Østfold (*Gränsmöten* 1999).

Norwegian and Swedish Legislation

Taking society's restrictions regarding graves in Norway and Sweden into consideration, it is obvious that the 1990s have seen a greater freedom of choice for the grave's leaseholder as to the shape of the gravestone as well as pictures, epitaphs and objects on the stone. Liberal legislation sanctioning this measure was passed in Sweden in

1990[1]. A comparable law was passed in Norway in 1996, effective on 1 January 1997. This replaced previous legislation passed in 1897 that became effective on 1 January 1898[2].

The leaseholder ("gravrättsinnehavaren" in Swedish, "festeren" in Norwegian) now retains the legal right to decide "who shall be buried in the grave, to provide the grave with a burial memorial and in addition to maintain control over it. … The leaseholder is required to undertake proper maintenance of the grave"[3] (Norway). "Epitaphs, photographs, decoration and use of symbols shall be decorous". The material used shall be of a permanent character and require minimal maintenance[4].

The equivalent Swedish legal text from 1990 states: "The leaseholder of the grave determines the appearance and character of the grave. This also applies to its decoration and general order. The proper authorities may, however, determine such limitations to the leaseholder's above-mentioned rights as are deemed necessary to the maintenance of proper grave culture"[5].

Due to these uniform statutes in Sweden and Norway, national regulation became more standardized where local regulations and restrictions had previously had greater consequence. The new legislation allowed for individual expression on the gravestones to a far greater degree than had been possible in the past.

Norwegian characteristics

1) Bronze figurines instead of inscribed symbols

During the late 1980s and the 1990s bronze figurines fastened to the front or top of gravestones became popular in Norway. These could take the form of flowers, birds or wild animals such as squirrels, or even teddy bears, or of religious symbols such as figures of Christ or crosses. Bronze plates engraved with poems could also be affixed to the stone, especially to fieldstones. In instances where such poems are engraved in minute lettering, the verses are often longer than those observed in Sweden. On a gravestone at Vestre Gravlund (West Cemetery) in Oslo, erected in 1992 in memory of a young woman, one can read what is termed a popular religious poem (see Dahlgren 2000:39f) in which the spirit of the deceased is compared to the flight of a bird towards heavenly freedom.

1. Statute on Burials and Burial Regulation of 6th December 1990. Svensk författningssamling (Swedish Legislative Compilation) 1990 no. 1144.
2. Statute of 3 August 1897, Norges Lover (Norwegian Legislative Compilation) 1996.
3. Statute 32, chapter 3, section 15, Norges Lover 2000: 2379.
4. Chapter 1, section 21-22, Norsk Lovtidend (Norwegian Law Gazette) 1998 1:55.
5. Statute on Burials, chapter 7. Grave Law section 26. Svensk författningssamling 1990 no. 1144.

2. A bronze portrait fastened to the front of a gravestone erected in memory of a fifty-two-year-old man in 1998 in Idd cemetery. A bronze bird has been set on the top of the stone. The hammer symbolizing a craft is very rare in Norway. Text: «Remembered with love». Anders Gustavsson has taken all the photos published in this chapter.

In some instances, a bas-relief bronze portrait of the deceased has been used instead of the photograph otherwise observed in Norway and Sweden in some cases involving children or young people. One example of this type of bronze portrait is found on the gravestone erected in 1998 in memory of a middle-aged man, a carpenter, in Idd cemetery near Halden (figure 2). In Vestre Gravlund in Oslo, I found the bronze portraits of two different young people as well as that of an eight-year-old child who had died in 1997. I have not observed anything similar in Sweden.

In some instances the text showing the deceased's name, date of birth and date of death has also been made up of bronze lettering (figure 3). New local regulations allowing such metal details in Oslo were adopted in 1998[6], even though usage of bronze figurines occurred earlier. As late as in 1994, it was enjoined that the use of "plates

6. Regulations for Churchyards and Cemeteries in the City of Oslo. The Joint Council of Churches. Oslo 1998.

3. Fastening bronze letters to a gravestone at Johansen Monumenthuggeri A/S, Skjeberg.

or other objects of brass, aluminium or plastic" be forbidden[7]. Stonecutters in northern Bohuslän who sold stones to Norway have noted that bronze figurines have been far more popular there than in Sweden. Other stonecutters in Sweden have sold almost no bronze objects. My observations during fieldwork show that some bronze figurines can be found in Sweden, but not at all to the same extent as in Norway.

The differences between Norway and Sweden may most certainly be considered as expressing differences in fashion. In this case, one cannot observe any particular differences in opinions and beliefs. It is not the figurines, that is to say the pictural symbols or epitaphs, that differ but the material, in this case bronze. A foundry producing bronze figurines in Sandefjord, the O. Storm Sørensen Bronze Foundry Ltd., founded in 1937, distributes catalogues showing a wealth of varying motifs intended for gravestones. These catalogues, which show many varied forms of crosses, flowers, spikes of corn, birds and boats in addition to lettering, are to be found at stonecutters. Norwegian stonecutting firms have various bronze figurines on display in order to assist family members in their choice of gravestone. I have not found anything comparable in Sweden.

According to cemetery personnel in Oslo, texts and figurines in bronze were a fashion that began to fade in the late 1990s. A stonecutter in Fredrikstad said in an interview that the use of bronze figurines and texts made up of bronze letters that had become so common in recent years, had been inspired by Continental fashions where

7. New Regulations for the Churchyards and Cemeteries of Oslo. The Joint Council of Churches. Oslo 1994.

they had been in use over a long period of time. During fieldwork in Paris in 2001 I could photograph many French bronze figurines. This was also true of Denmark.

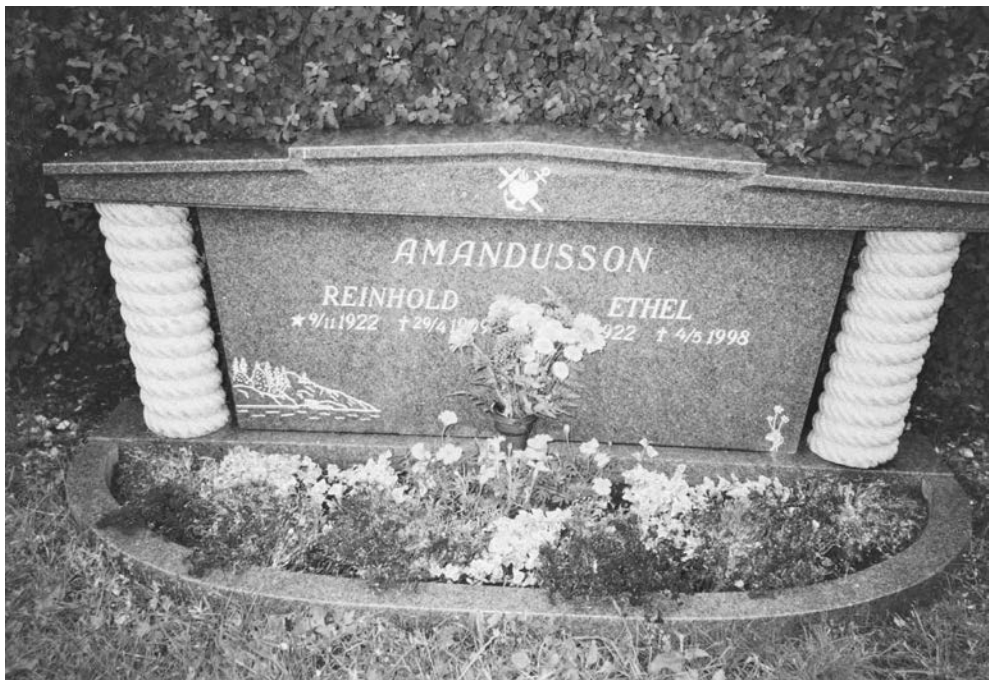
In Sweden, however, there are no clear signs of such inspiration having taken place and of having inspired stonecutters or family members when death occurred. One has instead continued an older tradition using carved pictures and inscriptions on the stones. Sweden has in this instance not been equally amenable to change.

2) Greater cost consciousness

Norwegian stonecutters assert oftener than their Swedish colleagues that relatives take economic factors into account and are more cost conscious when choosing stones and figures. They often telephone to several companies and compare prices. The customer can come to a stonecutter and ask for the cheapest alternative (Fredrikstad). I have not received comparable information from any Swedish stonecutters despite the fact that the Swedish economy, both on the national and the individual level, has been weaker than the Norwegian since the 1990s. Economic consciousness of the kind found in Norway counteracts revitalization while individual choice becomes more expensive and thus reinforces traditional alternatives. In this we can observe that tradition, in this instance concerning an ideal of practising economy, can continue to make itself felt even when external economic conditions change or improve, as has been the case during the economic boom period from the 1990s on in Norway.

Novelty costs a good deal more and such costs are often anticipated in Sweden despite far more difficult economic conditions than in Norway with, for example, higher rates of unemployment and extensive State cutbacks. This is an example of prioritization within the families, and cemetery memorials have frequently been given a remarkably high priority. In some instances, the relatives, especially in Sweden, have spent a great deal of money to emphasize the deceased's lifetime achievements. It has been regarded as the ultimate presentation of the deceased's life. This also concerns such principles of self-realization (see below) as can be realized providing when one has sufficient economic resources and is also prepared to stake them on this instead of other objectives.

One example concerns the commission received by the firm Gravvårdstjänst ("Grave Monument Service") in Tossene, Sweden, in competition with another company. The commission involved the making of a complicated gravestone commemorating a man, a seine-net maker from Rönnäng born in 1922 and died in 1999 (figure 4). The man's only child, a son, desired a stone illustrating this craft. The stonecutter stated in a newspaper interview that the son "had seen old gravestones framed by a rope carved into the stone. But the chosen design, a rope twined around two poles was his own idea. And I have never seen any work like it" (*Bohusläningen,* 23 May 2000). The work was extremely demanding and required extreme skill by the stonecutters.

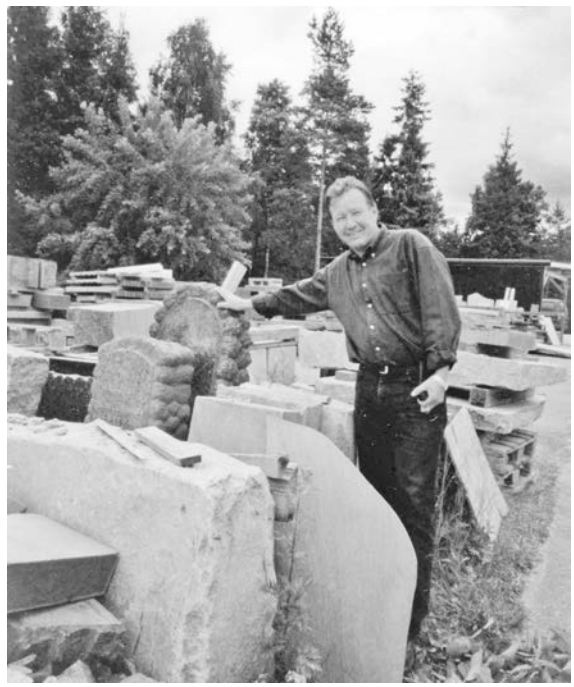


4. Gravestone for a seine-net maker and his wife in Rönnäng. Carved depiction of a rope twined around two poles. Uppermost the Christian symbols for faith, hope and charity.

The cost was no object for the son, who had sufficient means to pay for the stone and whose ambition was to raise a distinctive memorial to his father. The price for this stone was considerably higher than was usual in this stonecutting firm, such prices being given as ranging between 5,000 and 10,000 Swedish crowns according to the size of the stone.

3) Reuse of older gravestones

A new production method that has gained popularity, especially in Norway during the past years, is the reuse of older gravestones that otherwise would be discarded. The stones have been set aside up against the churchyard wall or simply piled in a heap at some disposal site, as I observed in Sarpsborg. Before being reused, the stone surface is ground smooth and new inscriptions and symbols are carved in. The form of the stones remains the same, however, in that they are considerably higher than the low stones measuring about 55-60 centimetres that have recently been in common use on all Norwegian graves. The new height of 150 centimetres was permitted after the Ministry had adopted new regulations in 1997. The cost of such reused gravestones is somewhat lower than new stones and this can appeal to the previously mentioned



5. Øyvind Johansen of the Johansen Monumenthuggeri A/S, Skjeberg, showing older gravestones which are to be reused.

Norwegian cost-consciousness. In addition, reuse of such old gravestones can be a link to older traditions. This again can appeal to the Norwegian interest in tradition relating to the appearance of the grave (see below). Reuse also fits in with ideals for protection of the environment in modern society. A market obviously exists for such stones. The alternative is that they be crushed and used as rubble in, for example, highway construction. This does happen to a certain degree, according to Norwegian stonecutters. In such cases the gravestones no longer lie about in disorder on the outskirts of the churchyards, but any thought of preserving older traditions must necessarily be lost.

The stonecutting firm of Johansen Monumenthuggeri A/S in Skjeberg, Østfold County, attaches importance to the reuse of older stones on, among other grounds, the aesthetic appearance of cemeteries and churchyards. Reuse is made known to potential customers despite the fact that profits are lower than with production of new stones. 5 to 10% of gravestone production is made up of reused stones (figure 5). As Øyvind Johansen of this stonecutting firm says: "It's about time that the stonecutting industry began to think of something other than profit and carving" (Kirkegården 2000/2). I have not observed examples of this form of production in my fieldwork areas in Sweden, or that the subject has been discussed in the same way as in Norway. Norway has a normal duration of 20 years for protection of the grave according to the new Statute of 1996[8]. This period of time can be extended if the grave is cared for and does not hinder the operation of the cemetery. The twenty years are a considerably shorter period of time than in Sweden, where a statute passed in 1990 stated:

8. Statute 32, chapter 3, section 14, Norges Lover 2000:2378.

"Leasing rights to the grave are held for a minimum of 15 and a maximum of 50 years, or forever"[9]. This means that in Norway in particular there are now a large number of surplus stones available for reuse.

Norwegian stonecutters also supply natural stones. These are a popular and often cheaper alternative than worked stones. In Sweden relatives usually procure such stones themselves while stonecutting firms do the inscribing.

4) More common use of devout pictural symbols and epitaphs

Visibly Christian pictures and epitaphs are far more usual in Norway than in Sweden, where judging by gravestones, secular and popular religious expressions lacking an obvious Christian character have a stronger position as regards death. Sociologist Curt Dahlgren, who specializes in religious studies, defines popular religiosity as having themes that "convey the idea of an immortal soul or a better life in the hereafter while not expressing a relationship to any institutionalized religion" (Dahlgren 2000:66).

The words "God", "Jesus" and "Lord" or references to Bible texts are far more common in Norway than in Sweden. This is especially true not only of Østfold County where evangelical and revivalist congregations abound, but also of Oslo. The epitaph on the gravestone of a one-year old child from Sarpsborg who died in 1998, reads "Our little sunbeam … Now your life is safe with God". Adult Norwegians, too, are given texts of a biblical nature as, for example, a thirty-eight-year-old man from Sandefjord who died in 1990 and whose epitaph reads "I am the resurrection, and the life. John 11, 25". In Fredrikstad one finds the epitaph "Blessed are they that die in the name of the Lord" concerning a 73-year-old man who died in 1991. Crosses encircled by rays of light, indicating a clearly Christian viewpoint, are quite often combined in Norway with a Christian text signifying a future life in Heaven, such as "Cast off the flesh, come to the Lord" on a gravestone dated 1993 in Enningdalen near the Swedish border.

Expressions that suggest a reunion after death, for example, "We'll meet again" are more usual in Norway. In Sweden such expressions usually apply to children's and young people's graves. In such cases it is, of course, far more difficult for relatives and friends to reconcile themselves to an irrevocable parting. This Swedish usage on some children's and young people's graves should be considered as the expression of a diffuse popular religiosity. Quotations from the Bible or hymnal occur only intermittently in Sweden and then especially on graves for clergymen and pastors. For the most part, it is only in Swedish regions such as Klädesholmen and Åstol, where

9. The Statute on Burials, chapter 7 Burial Rights, section 5. Svensk författningssamling 1990 no. 1144. If nothing definite is decided upon, the leasing rights are to last for 25 years.

Nonconformist churches are numerous, that one finds such epitaphs on lay persons' graves. Elsewhere in Sweden such vaguely popular religious texts such as "There is Something beyond the Mountain" (by poet Dan Andersson) or the original English text[10] "Where the Roses Never Fade" are more usual and are also sung at some funerals. One can here infer some thoughts concerning a life everlasting. Secular texts and shorter phrases also express thankfulness, feelings of loss or that the departed one lives on in the memory of family and friends. These are, of course, completely worldly ways of thinking.

Christian values are more explicitly expressed in Norway, particularly with regard to an angel theme, than in Sweden, where a secularized or popular religious opinion without any specific Christian basis (see Köstlin 1994, Alver 1999) is more evident. A single angel can lead to the idea of the departed being an angel with wings, which again means children. At Stala cemetery in Orust, Sweden, one can find the epitaph "Our beloved wild angel" on a wooden cross over the grave of a four-year-old girl who drowned in 2000. A white horse, rearing on its hind legs and equipped with wings, has been placed in front of the grave (figure 6). That is not a Christian motif but reminds us of the winged horse Pegasus in Greek mythology (Biedermann 1991:318f).

6. A wooden cross over the grave of a four-year-old girl in 2000 at Stala cemetery. A seared inscription reads "Our beloved wild angel".

It is easier to construe underlying Christian values if the picture of an angel is combined with other Christian symbols. This can be found in Norway, as on the grave of an 18-year-old man from Sandefjord who died in 1999. Two bronze angels placed on the stone's surface are combined with

10. "Where the Roses Never Fade", by Jim and Elsie Black. Andliga vissångboken (Spiritual songbook) 1989:18.

7. Heart-shaped gravestone on the grave of an 18-year-old youth in 1999 from the town of Sandefjord. Two bronze angels, and also a teddy bear, placed in front of the stone, are combined with incised Christian symbols for faith, hope and charity. Text: "Our loved ... For ever in our hearts".

carved Christian symbols for faith, hope and charity (a cross entwined with an anchor and a heart) (figure 7) (Dahlby 1968:83, Ursin 1949: 85f). Angels have also been placed on graves of older people together with a cross and a Christian text.

A figure of Christ is not unusual on a Norwegian gravestone, and then often in bronze, but is almost unthinkable in Sweden. A halo'd shepherd bearing a staff in his hand and watching over sheep is a recurrent theme in Norway and, to some extent, in Sweden. This refers to Jesus as being the Good Shepherd.

The worldly and the sacred are combined in Norway in an entirely different manner than in Sweden, where worldly pictures and epitaphs more often appear alone. Persons who have worked in shipping can in Sweden have an anchor or a freighter depicted on their gravestones. The stone can even be shaped like an anchor. A symbol of a boat that in Sweden has become an occupational or recreational symbol (see below), can often be combined in Norway with a religious text comparing life to a sea voyage. In Sweden such a combination of the sacred and the worldly will be found only in revivalist areas such as Grundsund or Smögen. At Idd cemetery near Halden

8. A maritime design showing a ship at sea together with a lighthouse and the religious inscription "In the gloom of night Jesus' name shines out like a lighthouse". You also find a shining star to the left. Gravestone for a forty-three-year-old man at Vestre Gravlund cemetery, Oslo, 1986.

in Norway, a gravestone from 1995 contains the inscription "Guide your ship in Jesus' name". The accompanying picture shows a ship crossing the ocean and steering clear of danger helped by a flashing lighthouse. Another inscription with a similar picture states: "In the gloom of night Jesus' name shines out like a lighthouse", which I found at Vestre Gravlund and Vestre Aker cemetery in Oslo (figure 8). The darkness of death is lighted up by Jesus' name. In Norway the anchor being entwined with a cross also shows the merging of the sacred and the worldly. This is also the case when flowers such as lilies-of-the-valley or spikes of grain are combined with a cross.

According to my field observations, *the cross* has maintained its popularity in Norway to a far greater degree than in Sweden during the 1990s. Continued regard for older traditions is widely accepted in Norway, as is the continuation of doing as one always has done and as others in one's surroundings usually do. The fact that use of the cross is more common than in Sweden should not necessarily be interpreted as evidence of a more explicit Christian foundation but also as expressing an awareness of the importance of traditions.

Black crosses have begun to be more associated with death and grief, something negative, in Sweden rather than with a Christian belief incorporating a conception of resurrection, something positive and bright. Because of this heightened association with death and sorrow, lessened usage of the cross during the 1990s in Sweden should not only be considered as expressing a growing secularization. It is not exclusively a matter of people having abandoned the Christian faith and become more worldly, but rather of the cross itself being perceived as having a different content than earlier.

This altered conception of the cross as being less a Christian trait can also be found in a quantified study of Swedish obituary announcements for the period 1976 to 1995 carried out by sociologist Curt Dahlgren from Lund University (Dahlgren 2000). In 1976, 99.7% of the announcements showed the symbol of the cross, whereas the percentage dropped to 40% in 1995 (cf. Tanggaard 1977). The cross is more common in Norwegian obituary announcements. In an extensive study carried out in 2000, linguist Geir Wiggen at the University of Oslo has, however, found that crosses in Norwegian obituary announcements also symbolize death, not necessarily a definite Christian viewpoint (Wiggen 2000).

Due to this conceptual modification, people have often felt that the cross has a somewhat dismal and serious character from which they wish to distance themselves in their encounter with death. This holds true for obituary announcements and funerals as well as gravestones. Other symbols are chosen instead, symbols that express a more positive view of death. As an agent for a stonecutting firm in northern Bohuslän states: "People don't want crosses nowadays. They fancy a brighter symbol. They can choose a sunrise, for example, to show that the deceased sat and watched the sun rise. Even a bird or a flower that the deceased loved, lilies of-the-valley, for example." Material symbols taken from nature are being used instead of symbols with a religious content. This latter usage will not necessarily disappear but can instead be expressed in the context of something vaguely and popularly religious (Dahlgren 2000:66). Birds, various wild animals or flowers can then be used. This can take the form of birds in flight winging their way somewhere.

Crosses encircled by rays of light, or so-called crosses of resurrection, have become the chosen Christian form of cross in Sweden, especially among revivalist church members. The cross of resurrection shows a white, sometimes gilded figure of Christ with hands outstretched as if crucified, encircled by a halo (figure 9). It can also consist of an outlined, not solid black cross surrounded by rays of light. The Salvation Army uses its own Christian symbol in which a royal crown encircles the inclining cross.

If the deceased has been a member of the non-religious but humanitarian organisation Human-Etisk Forbund, then this group's symbol has been found as the sole symbol both on a few gravestones in Oslo (figure 10) as well as in obituary announcements (Skjelbred 1995).

9. A cross of resurrection for an elderly fisherman and his wife, deceased in 1999 and 1992 respectively, on the island Åstol. Buried at Rönnäng cemetery. The couple belonged to the Pentecostal movement. The husband was one of my informants when I wrote the book on Pentecostal Movement on Åstol (Gustavsson 1984).

10. The symbol of the non-religious, humanitarian organisation Human-Etisk Forbund on a gravestone for two men who died in 1991 and 1995 respectively. Nordre Gravlund cemetery, Oslo.

During the 1980s and 1990s, an increasing number of Norwegian gravestones appear that have no pictural symbols whatsoever. Only the deceased's name and dates of birth and death are indicated. This usage is especially frequent in the Oslo area (see figure 18), according to my field material, and applies to both older and younger persons. This can be considered as an expression of secularization in which the cross, previously the most-used symbol, disappears without being replaced in any way. A void replaces a previously common pictural symbol.

This usage is much less common in Sweden. Here use of worldly pictural symbols has instead become far more common. These symbols have a bearing on the deceased's occupation, recreational activities, love of nature etc (see below). New symbols have appeared to replace the old ones.

5) Earliest usage of separate grave and gravestone for the stillborn or miscarried
Stillborn children or miscarried, long-term foetuses gained a legal right to a separate grave during the 1990s and beginning in Norway. Not only gravestones but obituary announcements as well have begun to be used (Skjelbred 1995). According to the national statute of 1996, all stillborn children are guaranteed a gratis grave in the municipality in which the mother resides[11]. This is something new as compared to the older custom. A commentary to the Government proposal states that "the boundary for miscarriage and stillbirth is commonly set at the 28th week of pregnancy"[12].

Graves and gravestones for stillbirth and miscarriages actually appeared much earlier than in 1996. The earliest examples in my collected material are a heart-shaped stone at Nordre Gravlund in Oslo dated to 1979 and at Idd cemetery near Halden dated to 1989 and 1990. Many subsequent examples can be found in the Norwegian material. Relatives seem to have had the same date written out for the day of birth and death, referring to the day of delivery even though the child was not born alive. It also appears that later in the 1990s, parents began using texts of a very personal nature, emphasizing the fact that they never had had the chance to meet these children. The epitaph on a grave in Sandefjord for a baby girl, Nora, dated to 1996, says, "You were the little girl we lost …". Concerning a pair of twins, a gravestone in Sarpsborg from 1999 bears the epitaph "Our twins Benjamin and David whom we never got to know. Sleep well". In addition to the inscription, the stone is decorated with carved flower buds. Another pair of twins from Sarpsborg was given a heart-shaped gravestone in 1998 decorated with two bronze birds in flight. Bronze teddy bears can also be used as decoration, as in an example from Sandefjord from 1998.

11. Statue 32, chapter 1, section 6, Norges Lover 2000:2377.
12. Proposition to the Odelsting no. 64 1994-95, Preparatory proposal V 1996:62f.

11. Crematorial urn gravestone for two stillborn girls, Skjeberg, 1996 and 1997, with the inscription "A little angel came to us, smiled and returned". One bronze bird on the top of the stone.

These Norwegian stones are of the same size as other gravestones for children and young people and are equally expensive. Heart-shaped stones are not uncommon. This shape expresses the love of the family to the dead foetus. The graves are also well cared for all summer long, showing that the parents have deep feelings about them. The foetus has had its own intrinsic value even though it was not born alive to the parents. A grave and gravestone that are clearly marked and not hidden away secretly, as was the custom earlier, can assist in the process of mourning. The child's first name is always indicated, but never any family name. This name helps to give the parents a definite object for their sorrow over the stillborn child whom they never met alive.

In the amended Swedish burial statute of 1999, effective on 1 January 2000 in connection with the separation of the Swedish church from the State, a revision was introduced regarding a guarantee of burial places for "any stillborn who has died after the twenty-eighth week of pregnancy"[13]. This is at the same point in time that Norway previously had adopted. This statute can result in more gravestones over the stillborn being set up in Sweden, too, in which case both legislation and practice have occurred somewhat earlier in Norway.

The earliest instances of gravestones for stillbirth or miscarriage which I have observed in Sweden concerns the stone for a boy, Mattias, in 1988 in Röra, and a girl, Hanna, in 1989 on Klädesholmen on the island of Tjörn. On a little fieldstone from 1993 in Stenkyrka churchyard, one can find the epitaph "Our son Hampus". At Ramneröds cemetery in Uddevalla there is a gravestone from 1994 for Pernilla on which

13. Chapter 2, section 3. Svensk författningssamling 1999:306.

a teddy bear is depicted. I found a comparable gravestone from 1997 for two brothers with two engraved teddy bears and two entwined hearts at Ljung cemetery in central Bohuslän. These children come from both rural and urban areas and have actually been given names even though they did not survive birth. Teddy bears and other tiny figures have also been set up on and in front of the stones. Natural fieldstones are most common in Sweden while the Norwegian stones are often worked and thus more expensive. In these cases it would appear that Norwegian thriftiness has not been as manifest as when adult grave are concerned (see above). Another interpretation is that more importance has been given to the view of children as being precious even before birth than to personal economic considerations.

Swedish characteristics

1) Inscribing both spouses' names and birth dates upon the death of the first partner

The Swedish custom, of which many examples still can be found, which places the surviving partner's name or name and birth date on the stone does not occur in Norway. There the name is not carved into the stone until the person concerned is dead even though the other spouse died earlier. In Sweden, this placement of both names is taken as a sign that a married couple belong together even after the death of one of them. At the same time, this signals that the survivor has no thoughts of re-marrying or of entering into a new relationship. This is more relevant the older the surviving member is. The custom does not, however, relate only to the elderly but also to the middle-aged in some cases. An example of this is the widow from Askum, born in 1941, who in 1994 had her own name and birth date placed on her deceased husband's gravestone (figure 12). For many years to come, she will see her own name every time she cares for the grave. Some people have found this oppressive and have, therefore, chosen not to follow the custom. If a personal signature is carved into the gravestone, something that occurs in a number of cases, examples have been observed of the surviving spouse's personal signature also being placed there (see figure 24).

The aforementioned Swedish custom can, however, lose its meaning or be altered in keeping with the increase in divorces and partnerships during recent years. The deceased can be divorced or living in partnership with someone else at time of death. After a divorce, the name of the surviving spouse will not be found on the gravestone, naturally enough. On the other hand, I have found a Swedish gravestone from 1999 on which the expression "sambon" ("partner") for the surviving woman and also her name and date of birth have been placed. Separate second names on the gravestone indicate that the couple had entered into a new relationship after an earlier divorce.

12. A widow from Askum, born in 1941 had her own name and birth date placed on her deceased husband's gravestone. The husband, who died in 1994, had been a postman. A design incorporating trees and two wild deer also decorate the stone as a sign that the deceased lived in a forested area. Two china doves in front of the stone follow a previous tradition.

A new trend is the providing of only enough space for the deceased's name but not the survivor's. This has to do with persons who have died fairly young or have been divorced. If the couple was married at the time of death, this can be a sign of the survivor's indication of freedom to enter into a new relationship. One indicates also that one's own death will take place sometime far in the future and there is thus no reason to specify this by leaving an empty space on the gravestone.

Inscribing the name and birth dates of living persons can in some cases also apply to parents of a dead child who had not yet established a family. This is the case for two parents in Långelanda, born in 1952 and 1956, who lost a two-year-old daughter in 1989 (figure 13). In some cases the child's name is placed at the bottom of the stone, so that there will be space for a later placement of the parents' names. This space is empty when the stone is first erected. There are several examples of this usage at Tuve cemetery on the outskirts of Göteborg. The child's death actualizes the parents' future death, and this is indicated by placement of their names or by leaving an empty space for future use. This custom has not been adopted in Norway, where

13. Two parents, born in 1952 and 1956, had their own names and date of birth inscribed on the tombstone of their daughter who died in 1989 as the result of an accident. The picture of a handshake symbolizes leave-taking. The dove carrying a leaf in its beak, inspired by the Old Testament story of Noah's Ark, symbolizes peace and reconciliation. Text: «Our daughter and sunbeam». Angrimseröd, the name of the farm, has been inscribed in keeping with the common tradition in the countryside.

14. A woman's name has in 1996 been inscribed to the right and a space left on the left for her surviving husband's name. A crematorial urn gravestone decorated with a woodbine, the provincial flower of Bohuslän, at the cemetery in the coastal village of Hunnebostrand.

gravestones are intended to be a monument to the deceased only. The cemetery is regarded as the resting-place of the dead. The demarcation line between the living and the dead is thus illustrated in a more pronounced manner in Norway than in Sweden, where nearness to the survivors is more emphasized.

2) Precedence between the sexes for positioning of the names

In Sweden, the man's name can still be placed in the foremost position on the left side, in keeping with older usage, and the woman's name to the right or secondary position, even though he dies later than she did (figure 14). This usage can also apply to younger people as in the case of a thirty-four-year-old woman in Smögen who died in 1999. The man's name can also be placed above and the woman's name below, similarly indicating a difference in rank.

This form of precedence between the sexes, which started to slacken off in Sweden during the 1990s, does not occur in Norway. There the one who dies first is named on the left and the other one on the right without taking consideration of sex, or the first to die is placed in the upper and the other spouse in the lower position on the stone. In this respect Norwegian practice has in recent years been far more neutral as to gender than has been the case in Sweden. Previously, however, the man's name was placed uppermost even in Norway. This usage was discontinued in Sandefjord some decades ago, according to information from the local and long-established stonecutting firm, Huseby. One may presume that the Norwegian equality debate, which has long marked the public sphere, can have contributed to Norway so definitively and so much earlier than Sweden having discontinued this older usage which separates the sexes and gives the man precedence over the woman. In this matter Sweden has been more tradition-bound than Norway.

3) Expressing the deceased's individuality

It would appear that in Norway the next of kin are less interested than their opposite numbers in Sweden in commemorating the deceased and in differing from their peers by means of the gravestone which they have erected. Instead, they select epitaphs and pictural symbols similar to those already chosen by others. This means that the individualistic elements, which came into use in Sweden during the 1990s, have become more pronounced there than in Norway. In this respect, one should remember that the new and more liberal Swedish legislation, adopted in the 1990s, has been in force for a somewhat longer period of time than in Norway. The new legislation in that country was first passed during the latter part of the 1990s (see above).

Next of kin in Norway usually visit cemeteries and study the stones and designs found there before making their choice. This has long been evident to both stonecutting companies and cemetery personnel. As was mentioned in an interview taken at a stonecutting firm in Fredrikstad, according to notes made at the time: "When relatives choose

a stone, they are not interested in having something eye-catching. They'd sooner do just the opposite." At another firm in Fredrikstad we were told that "people are careful not to break any norms. A cemetery is not exactly the place where they want to be conspicuous." Relatives therefore follow the beaten path of tradition instead of finding variations that depart from what is normal. In this respect one might assume this to be a result of Norway having been, historically speaking, a far more equalitarian society with fewer social distinctions than Sweden. In a hierarchic and socially separate society, marking one's status becomes important. A cemetery can become an arena for this when sanctioned by outer considerations such as the prevailing legislation. When self-realization becomes a desirable goal in a society, as is the case in Sweden in many respects, this can also be expressed in a cemetery through the choices made by the next of kin. Indications that this is so can be observed in the Sweden of the 1990s to a far greater degree than in Norway. Gravestones thus reflect the prevailing values of the surrounding society.

4) Inscribing the name of the home district in rural areas and smaller towns
Displaying its name on the gravestone can indicate the importance of the locality within the parish where the deceased lived. This holds true in rural districts and is not a reflection of the deceased's social status. It also applies to smaller towns that are part of a rural congregation (as Skärhamn or Henån) or islands (Åstol, Dyrön) but not to cities or smaller towns with their own graveyards. It hardly ever occurs in Norway, which does not necessarily mean that the home district is less important in the Norwegian countryside but that there is no tradition for this usage. At Berg graveyard, Norway, very close to the Swedish border near Svinesund, the custom of naming the home community used to be observed just as it was on the Swedish side of the border. This is a Norwegian exception very near the Swedish border.

If this specification of one's home district is important in rural areas and adjacent small towns, what happens if the deceased has lived in several different places during his or her lifetime? Such moving from place to place has become more common in the past few years, not only in cities but increasingly so even in the countryside. What appears to happen, in Sweden but not in Norway and then, especially if the deceased has not resided in the new area for very long time, is that both the place of birth and place of death can be displayed together with the birth and death dates. This applies to a fifty-seven-year-old woman from Skurup in the province of Skåne who had lived for one year in the town of Hälle in Lommeland near the Norwegian border when she died of cancer in 1997 (figure 15). This usage occurs not only in the countryside but even in cities, particularly if the deceased has grown up in the country or one of the small towns. On a gravestone from Kungälv one can read of a man who was born in 1907 in the small town of Vara in Västergötland province and died in 1996 in Kungälv. At Sigelhults graveyard in Uddevalla the epi-

15. The birthplace of a woman born in Skurup in the province of Skåne in 1940 is inscribed on the crematorial urn gravestone together with the name of the village, Hälle in the parish of Lommeland near the Norwegian border. This is where she had lived only one year before her death in 1997. A pictural symbol of an owl, the symbol for the goddess Pallas Athena, has also been inscribed. The owl has the ability to see in the dark, which has a symbolic meaning in connection with death (Biedermann 1991:440). The widower wanted to mark the wisdom of his wife through the owl. Another symbol is the heart indicating devotion to the deceased. The glasses indicate that the deceased wore glasses.

taph on a gravestone says of a man born in 1908 and dead in 1998 that he "lived and worked for a long period in Björneborg, Värmland province". Comparable usage is very seldom found in Norway. Information of this kind shows that a feeling of solidarity applies not only to the place where one spent the last years of one's life but also to the place where one was born and brought up or lived for a long period of time. This feeling seems to be the more important the vaster the distance is between these different places.

The official *province flower*, which in Bohuslän is the woodbine, appears in some examples, bearing witness to the importance of one's home province or geographic re-

gion in addition to the local town. Certain stonecutting companies, such as Gravvårdstjänst ("Grave Monument Service") in Tossene and Bullaren's Gravvårdsstenhuggeri ("Grave Monument Stonecutters"), often recommend these official flowers. In the area around Tossene, such as in Hunnebostrand and Kungshamn, there are many examples of gravestones embellished with an inscribed woodbine (figure 14 and 22). Given the stonecutters' active part in occasionally suggesting the provincial flower, it may well be that regional significance is not as important for the next of kin as it may seem when one considers the pictural symbols chosen for gravestones.

Indication of province or county is just as seldom as naming the home district in Norway. Once again this indicates the importance of tradition in the choice of gravestone. In Norway regard for regional importance has been even greater than in Sweden concerning, for example, politics, culture and local dialects. This has, however, never been considered worth emphasizing on a gravestone after a person's death. Gravestones thus do not reflect the existing society, as they do in the rural districts of Sweden.

If the deceased has moved to Sweden from some other Nordic country, some

16. Two coloured flags, the Swedish and the Norwegian, for a woman who grew up in Norway and after her marriage lived on the island Dyrön where she died in 1999. The golden flowers entwined about the golden cross indicate the combination of the spiritual and the worldly typical for the religious movement Evangelical Fatherland Foundation. The woman's name has been placed on the right side with space for her husband's name on the left. The grave is located at Rönnäng cemetery.

coloured depictions of the national flags of both Sweden and the native country have begun to appear on gravestones. A gravestone found in Rönnäng graveyard for a woman born in 1930 in Norway, but who had moved to Dyrön on her marriage, displayed a Swedish and Norwegian flag in 1999 (figure 16). I have found some few examples of use of a single Swedish flag, such as at Tuve on the outskirts of Göteborg, concerning a young person who had lived solely in Sweden. The custom of depicting flags on gravestones appears to have only just started and time will show if others will follow these few examples. I have no examples whatsoever from Norway, something that one would almost expect considering the strength of national pride exhibited there when celebrating the national holiday on 17 May (cf. Blehr 2000). This celebration is far more exuberant than anything one could ever imagine in Sweden. Using gravestones for the expression of national pride has, however, never had relevance for Norwegians or for immigrants to Norway.

5) Regular visitation and care of family graves

One difference between Norway and Sweden that I have observed during fieldwork in cemeteries is that one does not meet as many Norwegians visiting their relatives' graves as one does in Swedish cemeteries. The persons whom I have interviewed in Sweden state that they, especially women, often visit their relatives' graves during the summer in order to care for flowers or even in remembrance of the deceased. This is particularly true of children's or young people's graves, especially in the years immediately following the death. Afterwards the frequency will diminish.

I have during my fieldworks not met with as frequent visits in Norway. It has, therefore, been impossible to carry out as many interviews in relation to the grave as in Sweden. Some Norwegians whom I have interviewed at other places than cemeteries, and who have recently lost a close relative, have said that visiting the grave itself has not been considered important. The memory of the deceased does not seem to be associated with the grave and with care of the grave to the same extent as in Sweden. This does not mean that remembrance of the deceased is less intense in Norway but that it is not as strongly related to the grave as in Sweden, where the deceased's home district is also indicated (see above). The reasons for this difference are open to discussion without, however, any certainty of finding a definite answer. The clear Norwegian connection between the spiritual and the worldly (see previous discussion) can have significance. The deceased's abode does not need to be linked solely to the grave but also to a more indiscernible existence unrelated to the actual grave. A more obvious secularization in this respect in Sweden could mean that the grave itself becomes the site linked to the deceased and to the remembrance of him or her.

Another factor that has significance, according to details supplied, is that surviving relatives in Norway oftener than in Sweden pay cemetery personnel to care for

17. A cemetery employee caring for a grave covered by a burial trust in the town of Sandefjord in 2001.

the grave. A burial trust is established and the relatives are thus freed from both any practical care and also any motivation for regular visits to the grave. According to the cemetery regulations for Sarpsborg for 1993, section 7: "Upon payment of a fixed sum as a burial trust, the cemetery authorities will assume responsibility for the planting and care of the grave. The burial trust is administered by the churchwarden as burial trust executive"[14]. A cemetery employee in Fredrikstad states concerning the routine in this city: "It is more and more usual that we cemetery employees are paid to take care of the grave. … Burial trusts have become more popular in recent years. There are more and more of them. In other words, people pay money, for example, 10,000 crowns" (figure 17).

On the other hand, my field observations indicate that Norwegians are just as likely as Swedes to take children with them when visiting the cemetery to care for relatives' graves. This is an observation that cemetery personnel also have made. As notes made during an interview with the owner of a firm of undertakers in Fredrikstad indicate: "People more often bring children with them to the cemetery. She has herself (the informant, author's note) taught her grandchildren to accompany her gladly to the cemetery. It's now more usual to see kids out there among the graves.

14. Cemetery regulations. Municipality of Sarpsborg. Churchwarden of Sarpsborg. 1993.

18. A mother and her two sons, eight and ten years of age, after they planted flowers on the mother's and grandmother's grave from 2000 at Vestre Gravlund cemetery in Oslo. The deceased's maiden name of Konglevoll has also been inscribed. This is very unusual in contemporary Norway and Sweden. The daughter, who lives near the cemetery, chose to follow this older tradition after she had observed all the examples of this usage on older graves. There is no pictural symbol on the gravestone.

Children often make things in kindergarten and at school that they bring with them as a gift to departed relatives". Cemetery personnel in Norway have observed several instances of children placing toys on dead children's graves also. I have photographed several parents and children visiting near relatives' graves. At Vestre Gravlund in Oslo, I photographed a mother and her two sons, eight and ten years of age, as they planted flowers on the mother's and grandmother's grave from 2000 (figure 18). The fact that children often come along to the local cemetery indicates that there is less feeling of taboo or fear of death and cemeteries in Norway than in Sweden.

6) Use of occupational symbols

During the 1990s, use of pictural symbols for many more occupations has grown in popularity in Sweden, whereas this is more seldom in Norway. In Norway one finds grain spikes for farmers or an anchor for seamen. The horses and tractors that are popular in Sweden are completely lacking in Norway as are symbols for the various crafts. There was, certainly, a middle-aged man from Idd near Halden who died in 1998 and had a hammer on his gravestone (figure 2), but this is a unique example. Fishing boats, which have become increasingly common on gravestones on the coast of Bohuslän, can be found only in a few cases in my Norwegian area of study. Swedish musicians can have a musical instrument or an artist can be given an oil colour brush. Other occupations, too, which occur in cities and small towns can be

19. The figure of a woman with a halo and a pair of tongs in her hand has been inscribed on the gravestone of a middle-aged woman dentist who died in 1997 and was buried at Svarteborg cemetery. This is the attribute of the dentists, the saint Appolonia (Nilsén 1986). The gravestone is shaped like a tooth.

represented with a symbol on the gravestone. This is also common among workers and craftspeople and not only among the middle and upper classes.

Although occupational symbols are not common in Norway, occupational titles are used there more often than in Sweden. Such examples are "Captain" or something similar for those who have been to sea, sometimes in combination with an anchor. This does not apply solely to high status occupations, such as teaching, building or dentistry, but also to shoemaking, as in an example from Halden from 1990. In Norway one could still observe the title "Doctor" inscribed on gravestones during the 1990s, while comparable Swedish examples could not be dated to later than in the 1980s. This is an additional example of how the established order is usually upheld in Norway and not rejected to the same extent as in Sweden. There almost no inscribed occupational titles dated to the 1990s can still be found. The few examples apply to the very aged or to occupations that are distinctive and uncommon. These are often higher status occupations, such as "Teacher" inscribed on the gravestone of a fifty-year-old woman from Svarteborg who died in 1997. Other high-ranking occupations have, however, begun to be represented with pictural symbols during the 1990s. The medical profession is represented by the coiled snake around a stave that

is characteristic of the god of healing, Asclepius (Dahlby 1968:111). Men who have been employed in public service can have the symbol of the enterprise in question, for example the Telephone Company, placed on their gravestones.

Younger or middle-aged Swedish *women* who have died have in some instances had an occupational symbol on their gravestones, as in the case of a young dancer in Tuve, a middle-aged dentist in Svarteborg (figure 19) or a draper in Uddevalla. We are then dealing with a younger generation of women for whom work outside the home has become more common than was previously the case. There are not, however, a great many such women who have had a personal occupational symbol. No equivalent whatsoever can be found for this usage in Norway. The few examples of occupational symbols have to do with men's professions. This should not be taken as showing less appreciation of women's importance in the working world, but instead as an illustration of the fact that pictural occupational symbols occur far less often than in Sweden. Instead of pictural symbols, occupational titles can be inscribed on gravestones of younger deceased women, as for example, "Førskolelærer" (Kindergarten teacher) for a forty-year-old woman who died in Sandefjord in 1991.

7) Increased usage of leisure time symbols

Modern leisure time has had many expressions on Swedish gravestones during the 1990s. This applies especially to city dwellers and less to people from rural districts, except for animal symbols that refer to the deceased's interest in hunting or pet animals. Leisure time or recreational symbols apply especially to the many masculine fields of interest, such as are sailing, leisure time boats (figure 20), sports fishing or sporting activities such as soccer, tennis, ice hockey or horse racing. There is even an example of a complete island community being depicted on a stone. Sporting activities refer for the most part to young men who participated actively in sports and who died in their youth.

In some cases, women's interests can also be expressed, sometime combined with an occupational symbol for the husband. A palette and brush can indicate the woman's interest in art and amateur painting, such as on a gravestone for a sixty-eight-year-old woman from Mollösund who died in 1996. The surviving husband's occupation in the royal navy is also depicted. This woman died in late middle age. In other cases, it appears to be somewhat more usual that a woman who dies at a younger age is given a leisure time symbol on her gravestone. At Sigelhult Cemetery in Uddevalla, a woman who was born in 1960 and died in 1995 has a grazing horse on her gravestone. In the small town of Hunnebostrand one finds an example of yellow chanterelle mushrooms painted on the crematorial urn memorial of a woman who was born in 1952 and died in 1993. Her favourite leisure time activity was picking chantarelles. Another example is the symbol for a pet in the form of a

20. A leisure time boat in coastal surroundings along the coast of Bohuslän with two gulls flying over the naked cliffs. The setting sun is associated with death. A gravestone from 1997 in Ramneröd cemetery, Uddevalla.

21. A thirty-year-old woman has had her pet cat depicted on her crematorial urn gravestone in 1999 at Tuve cemetery on the outskirts of Göteborg. Text: ”Our beloved”.

cat found on the gravestone of a thirty-year-old woman from Tuve who died in 1999 (figure 21).

Just as in the usage of occupational symbols observed in recent years, symbols for modern leisure time and sports activities have not as yet found a definite expression on Norwegian gravestones. Use of a natural stone from the vicinity of a holiday cottage in the mountains or near the sea is the only exception. A stonecutter working at a firm in Fredrikstad says that the next of kin quite often come in and ask: "What are the proper dimensions for a stone such as we plan to get from the mountains?" There are also some examples of the depiction of pets such as a dog or a goat.

The absence of explicit leisure time symbols should be seen in connection with the fact that personal expression on gravestones and use of innovative symbols has not been as widespread in Norway as in Sweden. One has instead been more attentive to traditions and interested in preserving older usage. The grave has been an arena where relatives prefer to take the usage elsewhere in the same graveyard as a model and to make no effort to differ from these others. In other respects, certainly, leisure time, love of nature and various sporting activities, especially winter sports, have at least as prominent a place in Norway as in Sweden. Expressing this interest on gravestones has quite simply not had relevance.

8) Choice of innovative symbols by next of kin or, in some cases, also by the deceased prior to death

In Sweden the next of kin usually submit proposals for symbols, epitaphs and stones, after which the stonecutting firm attempts to fulfil them, initially by the use of sketches and drawings. These can be gradually modified in the course of discussions with the relatives. One stonecutter in Tossene in Bohuslän differs somewhat by usually emphasizing the importance of expressing the deceased's interests on the stone. If the relatives do not make suggestions, this stonecutting firm suggests, inter alia, the provincial flower, which is the woodbine. This is done to ensure that the choice of symbol will not be too lacklustre, but this is, as mentioned, not the usual practice at this firm. In many cases, the relatives instead indicate their own definite preferences, such as in the case of the above-mentioned net-binder design in Rönnäng in 1999 (figure 4). In actively proposing their own ideas, the next of kin are able to emphasize individual details in the deceased's life. This can, in turn, counteract the deceased becoming anonymized and forgotten in a short period of time.

In recent years, one also finds examples from different social strata in Sweden of the deceased having expressed his or her own wishes for the gravestone. They think of their future memorization during their actual lifetime. A farmer from Tegneby who was born in 1925, expressed before his death that he would like to have one of his horses, a stallion of North Swedish breed, depicted on his gravestone. After the man's

death in 1999, his widow questioned the propriety of placing a picture of a horse on the stone. She deferred to his previously expressed wish, however. This was in large part because she had seen a gravestone in the same cemetery for another farmer who had died in 1997 on which two horses were depicted, drawn moreover by the deceased's son. That was the first example of this symbol being used in this cemetery. In addition to the horse symbol, the widow in question also used a few more traditional symbols: a cross and a couple of grain spikes to symbolize agriculture. These two symbols were larger-sized than the horse. The cross was also painted in gold so that the innovative black-painted horse symbol would not be so conspicuous (figure 22). It was, obviously, essential that a diverging innovation would be associated with older traditions. The stonecutting firm was given a photograph of the stallion to use as a pattern for shaping the gravestone.

Another example is the older model Volkswagen, which was placed on the gravestone of an auto salesman from Ljung in 1999, as he himself had requested during

22. A farmer from Tegneby specifically asked for a picture of his black stallion to be painted on his gravestone. His widow added a gold-painted cross and two spikes of corn, two rather more traditional symbols in 1999. The name of the farm, Tvet, has also been inscribed in keeping with the common tradition in the countryside.

his lifetime. The link to his occupation was to be clearly indicated after his death. The design of waving curtains in a window found in Ramneröds cemetery in Uddevalla is associated with the expressed desire of the deceased who had owned a drapery. A man from Uddevalla who died in 1998 specified that his gravestone in Sigelhults cemetery would be made from a doorstep from his much-loved summer cottage.

This custom of the deceased making proposals as to what is to be done after their own deaths indicates an increasing individualization and a relaxation of a previous taboo against discussing death. This is something that I have observed in my conversations with surviving relatives concerning death and the choice of gravestone for persons in the informant's immediate family (see chapter 5).

Norwegian stonecutting firms play a more active part in making suggestions. If not, the next of kin will often choose more traditional symbols with which they are already familiar. A manifest example of a stonecutting firm's active participation is found in a gravestone on which an anvil and a hammer are shown. This is in Skjeberg cemetery in Østfold County and was placed on the grave of a blacksmith born in 1908 and died in 1997. His abilities as a blacksmith were known and respected throughout the surrounding district. The stonecutting firm Johansen Monumenthuggeri A/S in Skjeberg therefore suggested this blacksmith design for the next of kin. They eventually approved the suggestion.

It is not unusual in Norway for stonecutters to advise against suggestions from the next of kin. One company in Fredrikstad dissuaded a young widow from adding the inscription "We'll meet again" because her relatively young age meant that she might re-marry. This company reportedly makes a point of guidance so that relatives can find an appropriate epitaph with which they will be satisfied in the future.

I have not found any examples in Norway of the deceased having expressed any preferences concerning the appearance of the gravestone previous to his or her death. Relatives, on the other hand, play a more active part and are quite often influenced by the gravestone producers to an entirely different extent than is the case in Sweden. The need to emphasize the individuality of the deceased does not appear to be as urgent in Norway as in Sweden. A collective way of thinking, in the sense of unhesitatingly doing as others have done previously, is still obvious.

Innovations and traditions

The preceding account has shown that several innovations that have arisen in Norway are lacking in Sweden, whereas older traditions are more respected than in Sweden. In this summing up, I will indicate how both innovations and past traditions have influenced the choice of symbols on gravestones in Norway and Sweden.

If we first consider innovations in Norway, we see that bronze figurines, including portraits in bronze, and bronze lettering, were introduced for use on gravestones, without having any distribution at all in Sweden. In Norway, however, these became quite the fashion. Stonecutters in Norway even have displays of such bronze figurines to encourage the relatives.

Norway was gender neutral far earlier and more consistently than Sweden, as is shown when the name of the spouse who first died, irrespective of sex, was inscribed to the left or higher up on the gravestone, which in each case is the primary position. The name of the surviving spouse was placed to the right or under that of the first deceased, in other words in the secondary position. Sweden has been more tradition-bound in this respect.

In Norway the reuse of old gravestones is also more common. In this way one retains links to past traditions concerning the shape of the stone and at the same time showing awareness of modern society's environmental considerations.

The more marked Norwegian price consciousness concerning choice of gravestones has counteracted innovations, individual symbols being more expensive and strengthened the choice for the traditional. One obvious exception concerns gravestones for stillborn children and miscarriages, regarding which Norway has acted somewhat earlier than Sweden. Parents have spent just as much in principle on these gravestones as when children or young people have died. The belief that children are a valuable gift even before birth seems to have carried more weight than mere considerations of a personal economic nature.

Religious pictural symbols and epitaphs are more common in Norway than in Sweden. This is more indicative of a greater awareness of tradition than of a greater regard for religion. This is especially noticeable concerning the cross, which not only in Sweden but also in Norway has come to stand for death and sorrow. A greater concern for traditions in Norway has, however, contributed to the cross being retained to a greater degree than in Sweden. In Sweden innovations have consisted of the use of more cheerful and worldly symbols. Birds, various wild animals or flowers are then employed. This can be considered an expression for an increasing secularization and a diffuse popular religiosity.

Something that points towards a greater religious consciousness in Norway, and is not only limited to rural districts typified by revivalism, is that worldly pictural symbols fairly often are combined with clearly Christian pictures or epitaphs. The symbol of a boat or ship, which in Sweden indicates occupational or leisure time interests, is in Norway combined with a religious inscription in which life is presented as a voyage.

Another trend in Norway, especially in Oslo, is that during the 1980s and '90s, more and more gravestones completely lack pictural symbols and epitaphs. The only

inscriptions concern the name, the birth date and the death date of the deceased. This can be seen as an expression of secularization in which nothingness replaces previous symbols and foremost among those, the cross.

The deceased's individuality has become more emphasized in Sweden. This can be partially a result of the new, liberal legislation of 1990 having come into force some years earlier than in Norway. This is not, however, a complete explanation. Surviving relatives in Norway are not as interested in emphasizing the special characteristics of their own dearly departed through the gravestone. One is more concerned with ascertaining and copying the symbolism and epitaphs that others have used previously in one's own cemetery or in other cemeteries visited. In this way one follows along in traditional directions instead of searching for variations. A collective mentality, in other words, makes itself felt rather than an individualistic one. The gravestone is not considered a proper place for calling attention to oneself. In this we can see the effects of Norway's having had a more equalitarian society than has Sweden.

The variety in choice of symbols and epitaphs is in this way more obvious in Sweden. This is shown by the use of new symbols for occupations and for modern leisure time activities, especially concerning men, which have begun to appear in greater numbers. In Norway, however, pictural symbols indicating occupation are rare, whereas professional titles are still written out with lettering in keeping with older traditions far more often than in Sweden. When self-realization has become a goal of the society in question, this can also be expressed in cemeteries, as is the case in Sweden, thus reflecting values in the surrounding society. This can also explain the greater frequency of visits to the cemeteries. Surviving relatives visit the grave to care for the flowers planted there and also to remember the deceased in a more tangible way. In contrast to Norway, such remembrance of the dead is also connected to a special locality in rural districts. This is done by inscribing the name of the deceased's home town on the gravestone, or even several names if the person in question has had a number of places of residence. This custom can also apply to city dwellers, particularly if the deceased was born in a rural district or in a small town.

Such increasing individualism and efforts at self-realization can also explain why next of kin in Sweden become so engaged in the choice of gravestone, pictural symbols and possible inscriptions. This is in marked contrast to Norway. There are also several instances in Sweden, again in contrast to Norway, of the deceased having made suggestions as to symbols for the gravestone in order to indicate the individuality of his or her own life. In this way one attempts to play a part in keeping one's memory alive at least for a time.

One of the similarities between Norway and Sweden is that when *innovations* have become well and truly accepted, they can in time *become a fashion*. This sometimes occurs on a national level, as in the case of bronze figurines and lettering in Nor-

23. A church located out on a point of land in a coastal district with the sea and rocky shoreline on a gravestone from 1988. A dove, symbolizing peace, flies over the church. The sun, which is partially hidden by clouds, symbolizing death, shines on the church. This has been a popular design in the coastal city of Sandefjord since the 1960s. Text: «Highly loved, deeply missed».

way (see above). In other instances, local trends appear, such as in the use of a coastal landscape design in the coastal city of Sandefjord, starting in the 1960s and continuing well into the 1990s. The design shows a church, not any specific church, however, out on a point of land surrounded by the sea and the rocky shores typical of the coastline (figure 23).

Another design shows a small boat secured to a dock running out from a boathouse. This design, based on a sketch by the deceased's son, was observed for the first time in Kungshamn in 1982 (figure 24). Other surviving relatives in the local district quickly took it up during the 1980s and 1990s. The inspiration for using new designs sometimes has to come from the outer world through people who have moved to the area. They can have the courage to break an accepted custom that can then be copied by others in the local area. The first time a design using a fishing boat appeared in Kungshamn was in 1979, on the gravestone of a restaurant owner who had moved to the town, according to the local stonecutting firm. As can be observed in the cemetery, this design was adopted by several local fishermen's families during the first part of the 1980s.

24. The first example from 1982 in Kungshamn cemetery showing a small boat secured to a dock running out from a boathouse. This design was based on a sketch by the deceased's son. Later on during the 1980s and 1990s several other families with graves in this same cemetery chose this design. The names of the husband and his wife have been inscribed with their own signatures. Two china doves in front of the stone according to a previous tradition.

It is precisely in coastal districts where people live in close proximity to one another, that the various families can tend to adopt an innovation introduced by others in the local area. This has been remarked upon by stonecutting firms during discussions with the next of kin concerning choice of design. This phenomenon has been observed in many aspects of material culture in coastal areas. Similar designs that appear on gravestones can thus be a part of a larger cultural pattern.

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3
The effect of revival movements on choice of present-day gravestone symbols

In this chapter I will examine whether and to what extent revivalistic religiosity affects pictural symbols and texts on gravestones. The time span employed, reaching from the 1980s and onwards, relates to a time far later than the period in the late 18- and early 1900s during which revivals flourished. When Norway is referred to in the following text, the region meant is Oslo and Østfold County. Similarly, Sweden means Bohuslän County and portions of Gothenburg.

Revivalist religiosity and death

Revivalistic religiosity is seen partly in relation to so-called general religiosity and partly to an absence of religious expressions on gravestones. One important factor here concerns views on life after death and how these are expressed. Pietistic revivalistic religiosity is, of course, characterized by the view that the afterlife constitutes the goal of earthly life. This is portrayed for believers in glowing terms, with God and Jesus as the key elements. The eyes are clearly fixed onwards at the moment of death, just as the departed life is played down. Within so-called general religiosity, however, the afterlife is regarded as being more ambiguous even if it here too is pictured in positive terms. The tone of the funeral ceremony is also expected to be optimistic. The sociologist of religion Curt Dahlgren defines general religious motifs as 'containing the idea of a soul or a better life in the hereafter without being directly linked to an institutionalized religion' (Dahlgren 2000:66).

Differences between Norway and Sweden

Generally speaking, spiritual pictural symbols and texts are more common in Norway than in Sweden. Deliberately Christian symbols and texts are also much more obviously expressed in Norway than in Sweden. The words 'God', 'Jesus' and 'Lord' or references to biblical texts are found far more often in Norway than in Sweden. One

example is the text “Salige er de døde som dør i Herren” (Blessed are they who die in the name of the Lord), as found on a gravestone from 1991 in Fredrikstad. Christian texts of this kind are found not only in Østfold, such as in Fredrikstad which is an area characterized by revival movements (Amundsen 1987). Several examples have also been found in Oslo where the incidence of revivalism has not been high. Quotations from the Bible or hymnals are found only sporadically in Sweden and then especially in connection with clergymen's or free church pastors' graves. It is, for the most part, only in districts marked by revivalism that such texts can also be found on present-day lay graves. In Sweden it is much more usual to find texts of a vaguely and general religious nature. This can indicate some sort of thought regarding an indiscernible existence after death.

In Norway one more often finds examples of explicit Christian values, such as angel motifs, when compared to Sweden. In the latter case, a secularized or general religious sentiment without a specifically Christian basis manifests itself more clearly, and concerns children's or young people's graves. A solitary angel can allude to the deceased as having been an angel with wings. When a picture of an angel is seen in combination with other Christian motifs, one can more clearly presume an underlying Christian meaning.

Expressions suggesting a reunion after death are more common in Norway than in Sweden, where they have to do with children's or young people's graves. The worldly is linked to the spiritual in an entirely different manner in Norway than in Sweden. A boat motif can often be found in Norway in combination with a religious text comparing life to a voyage. The text can read: “Guide your ship in Jesus' name” or “In the darkest night, Jesus' name shines like a beacon”. Eternity is then a shore on the far side of the sea and the darkness (fig. 1). In coastal towns in Norway, such as the formerly important seafaring town of Sandefjord, the anchor motif can often be found encircling a cross (fig. 2). In Sweden, such combinations of the spiritual and the worldly are only seen in towns with a strong revivalistic tradition, such as Grundsund, Smögen, Klädesholmen and Åstol (fig. 3).

Crosses surrounded by beams of light, so-called crosses of resurrection, have begun to be the preferred Christian variant in Sweden, especially in revival settings. The cross of resurrection consists of a white, sometimes gilded figure of Christ whose hands are stretched out in a cross-like fashion (fig. 4). The cross can also be shown not as solidly black, but in outline and encircled by beams of light. This gives a much more radiant impression than the solid black cross. Crosses encircled by beams can also be found in Norway and then quite often in combination with a Christian text indicating a coming existence in Heaven.

1 The text "The eye of faith gleams with the light of eternity's shores" is combined with pictural symbols showing the setting sun and two stars shining across the sea. This symbolizes the necessity of navigating amongst the numerous rocky islets, mountains and storms of life. All photographs in this chapter are by Anders Gustavsson.

2 An anchor encircles a cross on a gravestone in Sandefjord raised to commemorate a ship's captain and his wife. The pictural symbol is combined with the worldly text "In loving memory" placed at the base of the stone.

3 A Pentecostalist on Åstol, a man who died in 1999, had on his gravestone a gold-rimmed cross combined with a cheerful flowery motif. The worldly text "Beloved, mourned" was accompanied by the spiritual text "Rest in peace until the Resurrection".

4 A so-called cross of the resurrection on a gravestone in Rönnäng over a couple who were prominent Pentecostalists on the island of Åstol. They were my informants when I wrote a book on the Pentecostal Movement on Åstol (Gustavsson 1984a).

The coastal towns of Bohuslän, Sweden

In order to give a more exact impression of earlier revival movements' effect on contemporary gravestones, I will exemplify by using certain coastal towns in Bohuslän County which have been characterized by free church or inner-churchly evangelistic movements. Has the use of religious symbols and texts continued in these towns, even though such usage has ceased in other places? My choice of Bohuslän is the result of my previous studies of various revival movements there as part of the Kattegatt-Skagerack Project during the 1980s. These investigations have given me valuable prior knowledge of the region. When I study gravestones in areas in Bohuslän characterized by revival movements, I recognize the names of families and individuals who have actively participated in the revivals in question. Christian motifs and texts do not appear to have been abandoned in Norway to the same extent as in Sweden. This means that studies of revival movements' influence within different localities in the former country are not as revealing.

One field observation that I have made in Bohuslän is that in the 1990s, crosses, both solid black and outlined, are more often found in localities characterized by nonconformist movements or by a west-Swedish inner-churchly movement known as Schartauanism (Lewis 1997). In such coastal localities one does not find boat motifs or other worldly coastal motifs as frequently as in non-revival coastal regions. Rep-

5 A sailboat amid coastal islands between a cross on a cliff point and the setting sun. A gravestone from 1983 in Grundsund cemetery.

6 The deceased, a man, depicted in his fishing boat along the coast, against a background of two birds above the setting sun. No religious symbol. Gravestone in Kungshamn cemetery.

resentatives of stone-cutting firms producing gravestones have also noticed the varying choice of motifs in the different coastal localities. Examples of this are, on the one hand, Smögen, whose prominent mission congregation has existed since 1879 (Gustavsson 1984b), and Grundsund, which has long been typified by Schartauanism. Kungshamn, on the other hand, which lies quite close to Smögen, has not been marked by similar revival movements. In Smögen and Grundsund, I have been able to find only a few boat motifs, despite the fact that fishing has for many years been an important occupation in both localities. The few examples that were found have often been linked to a Christian motif. One example, from Grundsund, consists of a cross on a seaside cliff with the setting sun in the background (fig. 5). Such boat motifs made their first appearance in Kungshamn in 1979. Quite often it is the deceased's own boat that is depicted but not, however, in combination with religious symbols (fig. 6).

Corresponding religiously characterized differentiation lines can be found in Tjörn. On the islands of Dyrön, Klädesholmen and Åstol, all marked by strong revival movements, only a very few boat motifs have been found in later years and those few are often combined with Christian texts and symbols. A married couple, born in 1932 and 1935 respectively, who died in 1999 on Klädesholmen, had a gravestone showing a sailboat together with a so-called cross of resurrection on a cliffside and a sun setting in the sea. The biblical text was taken from the book of John 11:25. Crosses

7 When his spouse died in 1997 in the seaport of Skärhamn, the old ship that the husband used to work on was depicted on the stone. Three birds wheel above the ship and a lighthouse shines on its port side, but religiously oriented symbols are absent.

of resurrection and Christian texts are also common on Åstol where the Pentecostal Movement has long had a prominent position (Gustavsson 1984a) (fig. 4). The boat motif without religious associations has, however, been much more common ever since the 1980s in the nearby seafaring town of Skärhamn (fig. 7) where there has not been any significant revival movement. In Skärhamn I found only one single boat motif in combination with any sort of religious symbol.

Revival movements and changes of symbols

These examples show how conscious religious activity and attitudes having roots far back in time can be given tangible expression in the choice of motif and text on latter-day gravestones, and even resist innovations of a more worldly character. It is interesting to note how local differences manifest themselves and how links with earlier revival movements continue to play a part in the localities concerned. A continuity based on a long-lasting, ideological Christian consciousness clearly makes itself felt long after a formerly vibrant revivalism has died down.

If one conducts in-depth studies of localities previously marked by deep revival movements, continuity can, however, be merged with change. At present one can find

8 The gravestone of a fisherman who died in 1987 on Käringön in Morlanda was inscribed with a fishing boat and the old Christian symbols for faith, hope and love: a cross, an anchor and a heart. The worldly text reads: "Endlessly mourned".

9 The landscape depicted on this gravestone shows the view from the home of a fifty-year-old man who died in 1992 in Ellös in Morlanda. The sun is setting in the background while a pair of birds fly off into the sky.

both revivalistically oriented and general religious motifs as well as clearly worldly motifs on gravestones in one and the same cemetery. Taking Morlanda parish on Orust as my example, I will use this one cemetery with its pronounced inner-churchly revival background to illustrate the mixture of motifs. Here one finds fishing hamlets, villages in which seafaring was important, boat-building towns, agricultural regions as well as the industrial locality of Ellös into which considerable numbers of people have moved from other regions. The mixed commercial structure is well-established, while the movement of people has taken place in later years. Individual families and persons in each locality have not retained their former revivalistic orientation in later years. A change in attitude has taken place between generations, while newer attitudes assert themselves among outsiders working in industry. This can even hold true of returning old-age pensioners and holiday-cottage owners who have lived in the city of Gothenburg for many years. The older inhabitants frequently used boat motifs combined with traditional Christian symbols (fig. 8). This is often not the case concerning outsiders and returning persons, who instead use general religious motifs and texts. One choice can be poet Dan Andersson's lines, “There is something beyond the mountains, beyond the flowers and the songs”. Motifs taken from nature without any obvious religious association are also popular (fig. 9).

In summing up, my intention with this chapter has been to show the importance of studying expressions of revivalistic movements over a lengthier period of time reaching to the present day. In this way one finds clear elements of continuity at the local level, as well as processes of change which take place over the course of time. Christian character is thus successively weakened, or can even more or less disappear if new forms for revivalistic movements do not arise.

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4
Death and the use of the senses in religious revival movements

In this chapter I intend to review the use of the different human senses in connection with death within religious revival movements, starting in the late nineteenth century and until the present day. The focus will be on sight and taste. The study is based mainly on my own fieldwork in the coastal regions of western Sweden, but also includes surveys of similar movements in the neighbouring countries of Norway and Estonia.

Sight

When death has struck, revivalist families considered and still consider it important that expressions of Christian faith be expressed on gravestones as professions of belief aimed at visitors to the cemetery. This applies both to texts and pictorial symbols, among these last the so-called Cross of the Resurrection encircled by rays of light. The texts on such gravestones often have a biblical origin and emphasize the resurrection of the dead. Among those most used is that taken from the Gospel according to St John, 11:25, "Jesus said: I am the resurrection and the life; he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live". Clearly expressed Christian symbols and texts on gravestones are much more common, generally speaking, in Norway than in Sweden in recent years. This can be because a larger number of individualistic and worldly pictorial motifs are used on Swedish than on Norwegian gravestones, but can also be the result of a more tangible secularization in Sweden, in the sense that spiritual dimensions are no longer expressed in ways that are visible to others.

Ghosts are among those beings from the evil and sorrowful part of existence. Along the coast they are the so-called "spectres", the unhappy corpses of those who have not been buried in sanctified ground and who therefore can be heard screaming in the night. This folk belief, which was very common among the older generation of members of revivalist groups, was not seen as being in conflict with a living and active Christian faith. Such experiences were openly spoken of with one's fellow be-

lievers. The folklife artist Carl Gustaf Bernhardson (1915-1998) painted several pictures of ghosts and "spectres" searching for their clothing after it had disappeared in connection with the gathering in of wreckage (fig. 1).

In comparison, an informant who was an active member of a free-church movement, the Swedish Mission Society, stated that he could see people who died many years ago, but that they had never been among the actively faithful. He sometimes experienced these visions while he walked to or from the mission meeting-house. He has never kept these visions secret, but has often told about them to other members of the mission society. With regard to such supernatural visions, one might quote something that the Norwegian folklorist Bente Gullveig Alver said concerning a study about a clairvoyant Norwegian woman entitled "The third eye": "It would be more unscientific to deny clairvoyance than to be receptive to its existence" (Alver 1982:35). The cultural scholar should always listen when informants speak about their experiences, rather than discuss whether these are real or fictitious. The study of the aspect of faith involved is far more important than any attempt to analyse the possible reality on which the experiences might be based.

1. A barely clothed seamen/spectre searches in the light of dusk for his clothes in a heap of wreckage, to the dismay of a watching woman. Painted by Carl Gustaf Bernhardson. Bohuslän Museum no. 080.

Taste

The consumption of food and drink with a pronounced religious aim has never played a prominent role in the popular religion of the Lutheranism-dominated areas of Sweden and Norway. In past times, all meals were preceded and closed by the saying of prayers (Gustavsson 1994, Bringéus 1997). An ancient custom that has vanished consisted of the mourners at a funeral drinking a glass of wine just before the coffin was taken to the church and the cemetery. This custom lived on into the twentieth century, primarily in those districts of western Sweden characterized by the home-mission revivalist movement known as Schartauanism. After the Reformation, this was done in memory of the deceased. The custom had no religious content, in other words, in contrast to mediaeval times when toasts were drunk in honour of God and the saints. The present-day memorial toasts have interest in this connection solely due to their having taken place in the context of a religious church funeral during which the vicar or a highly placed layman proposed a toast with the words "We drink this wine to honour the memory" or "We raise our glasses in memory of the deceased". This took place after the vicar had conducted prayers and before the mourners had left the deceased's home (Gustavsson 1980) (fig. 2).

During my investigation of symbols on gravestones in Norway and Sweden I found indications of food only on a few immigrants' graves (fig. 3). This was, for example, the case in 2001 when plates of fresh apples and oranges were placed in front of the gravestone of a Chinese woman who was born in 1947 and died in Sweden in 1992 (Gustavsson 2003: 46).

2. A glass of wine is drunk in memory of the deceased in her home at a funeral in western Sweden in 1973. Photo by Anders Gustavsson.

Outside the Protestant regions of the Nordic countries, however, similar

3. Plates of fresh apples and oranges placed in front of the gravestone of a Chinese woman who died in Sweden 1992. Photo by Anders Gustavsson.

phenomena can be found, especially in Orthodox regions. The Finnish ethnologist Nils Storå was able to study memorial meals arranged on relatives' graves by the Orthodox Skolt Sami of Finland. He wrote in 1971: ”The main element in these commemorative feasts is the meal in memory of the dead man in which he also takes part. On the occasion of collective feasts of remembrance all the family´s dead take part” (Storå 1971:270).

In my own case, and in connection with a world congress of folklorists in 2005 in Tartu, Estonia, I had the opportunity of conducting fieldwork among the Orthodox Setu people in south-eastern Estonia. Many religious ceremonies have been re-established and revitalized in this region after Estonia’s independence from the USSR in 1991. I participated in an important religious holy day in the town of Saatse near the Russian border. Here I experienced the deceased's next of kin, both younger and older persons, placing meals on graves (fig. 4). Such meals were arranged on a large number of graves. Tables had often been laid on the graves on which both food and drink, especially vodka, were placed. It was not difficult to understand that this was a festive occasion. Although participating clergymen conversed with me in German, I could not speak directly to the laymen among the Setu people, but had to rely on an Estonian interpreter. The hospitality of the participants was very evident and also involved the unknown fieldworker who visited several of the different graves. I and my interpreter were offered food, sweets and drink, both vodka and soft drinks. I was,

4. A family of the Setu people gathered together with two black-clad Orthodox priests for a commemorative meal at their relatives' graves during the holy day Päätnit-sapäev in the summer of 2005 in the town of Saatse in south-eastern Estonia. Photo by Anders Gustavsson.

however, more interested in documenting, conversing with and taking photographs than in eating and drinking, ignorant as I was about the cultural codes present at the scene. Both the clergymen and my interpreter pointed out that I had to accept whatever was offered because refusing the people's hospitality would be considered an insult, in other words, if I did not eat and drink whatever was offered to me (ISFNR newsletter 2006, no. 1). Acceptance of hospitality was considered to be an honouring of both those who offered and also the deceased by whose grave one stood. On such occasions, festivity and joy characterize the living at the same time as they experience solidarity through time in relationship to their deceased relatives.

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5
Ethics and death

In my research project concerning the pictorial symbols and texts found inscribed on gravestones, and the objects fastened to gravestones, I have focussed on the 1990s. This decade was characterized by a strongly modified praxis. This is shown, *inter alia*, by the use of the new pictorial symbols and by the objects, with or without accompanying texts, that have begun to be placed alongside flowers in front of the gravestone. Texts written on paper and placed inside plastic covers, or even painted on separate, smaller stones have also begun to appear.

In the first section of this chapter my aim is to lay ethical research perspectives on my fieldwork in the gravestone project. What are the problems facing the scholar in this connection, and how should they be dealt with in an ethically justifiable manner?

I Fieldwork in cemeteries

My periods of fieldwork in cemeteries have included photographing, observations, and interviews with the deceased's next of kin and with personnel at stone-cutting workshops and cemeteries. My intention has been to study how individual imagery has been expressed after this was permitted in both Norway and Sweden by new legislation in the 1990s.

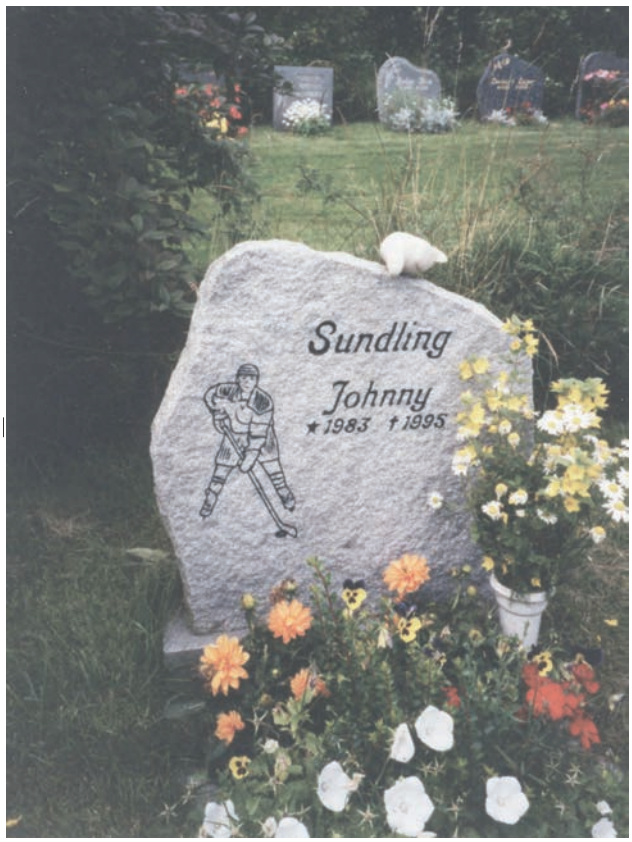
When the distinctly individual is aspired to by the next of kin, a desire for originality can occur, even to the extent of seeking to be the first or the only ones to choose a new motif for a gravestone. This is something I have been able to observe during fieldwork. The next of kin have on occasion approached me when they have noticed or have been informed by others that I am conducting a study of gravestones and photographing them. They have then wished to show me their own gravestones and to discuss the motifs on them. To my surprise, I have not experienced any difficulties in conversing with them about death and the deceased person, even when the latter has recently died and is sometimes a young person. The gravestone instead appears to be an object of pride that is willingly exhibited. Both pride and willingness increase in relation to the degree of individuality shown in the stone.

1. The mother and sister of the deceased Markus Hermansson, 1985-1999, standing behind his gravestone on which an ice hockey player is depicted. Some of Markus' comrades, who knew of his great interest in soccer, have placed a soccer ball on the grave at Sigelhult Cemetery in Uddevalla. All photos in this chapter by Anders Gustavsson.

I will present as an example an occurrence at Sigelhult cemetery in Uddevalla one summer day in 2000. A fairly young mother who was caring for a grave near the area I was documenting, approached me and asked that I come over to her grave because it was so special. She undoubtedly felt certain that I had never seen a motif comparable to the one she and her husband had chosen for the gravestone. It represented an ice-hockey player and was placed on the grave of a fourteen-year-old sports interested boy who had died suddenly in 1999 due to an inflammation of the cardiac muscle (fig. 1). I must have disappointed this mother to some extent by saying that I had seen the same motif on another gravestone, this one for a twelve-year-old boy in a cemetery in Norum lying some thirty kilometres away (fig. 2). The woman then said, however, that she intended to drive there to see that other gravestone.

Ethical considerations when photographing during the summer

Taking photographs of gravestones during the summer should not lead to any ethical problems of consequence. Gravestones are found in cemeteries which are, of course, public areas. They are thus available for observation by the public, including the field-worker. This becomes problematical if and when certain encroachments in the private decorations on the grave become necessary before it is possible to photograph them.



2. An ice hockey player has been incised on the gravestone of Johnny Sundling, 1983-1995, in Norum Cemetery in Bohuslän. The fieldworker has moved the vase of cut flowers to the right so that the text and the picture can appear in the photograph.

Can this be ethically justifiable (cf. Klein 1993)?

One problem when taking photographs during the summer is that plants and flowers can conceal the inscription on the gravestone. It has often proved difficult to photograph all the symbols and text, something that also is caused by present-day gravestones being considerably lower than those erected earlier in the 1900s. On occasion I have had to refrain from photographing because planted flowers have almost hidden the pictures and texts on the gravestone. In some cases I have made a note of this in my field diary. Concerning one gravestone in Sandefjord I wrote: "Low stone, impossible to photograph because of the large number of daisies in front". In other cases it has been possible to bend the plants to one side or to move flower pots in order to reveal the texts and pictorial symbols (fig. 2).

An ethical dilemma arises when the next of kin have not been present in connection with taking the photograph. How great an ethical right does one have to move flowers in order to reveal gravestone inscriptions? This is a question of showing respect when doing fieldwork in a cemetery where silence, responsibility and respect should be observed for the deceased persons and for those next of kin who care for the grave. When Nils-Arvid Bringéus, who conducted a great deal of research on death seen in a cultural perspective, speaks of "the ethics of death", he emphasizes that "ethics deal with respect for our fellow men, indeed for all living creatures. In other words, ethics concern

3. A woman in Sandefjord holds back roses that hide the text on her son's gravestone. He would have been 40 years old on the day in 2000 when the photograph was taken.

above all else our relations to the mourners or survivors" (Bringéus 1994:15). According to laws in both Norway and Sweden anyone frequenting a cemetery must avoid giving offence. The national regulations in Norway from 1997 enjoin that "all visits to, traffic in, work in and other activities in a cemetery shall be carried out in a decorous manner and with as little noise as possible, so as not to give offense to anyone" (*Norsk Lovtidend* 1998:53). One practical guideline that I have observed is to refrain from damaging plants during fieldwork, and to have consideration for the reactions of the next of kin as they care for their graves during photographing.

Moving a vase of cut flowers to one side while I take photographs is an action I have felt to be ethically acceptable (fig. 2), providing I replace the vase on the same spot as carefully as possible. When next of kin have been present during photographing, they have actually been interested in having me photograph all the pictorial symbols and texts (fig. 3). None have voiced objections to being photographed or to conversing with me. The next of kin have themselves moved flowers that hindered the view. Nothing on the stone was to remain hidden. After the parents of the deceased Lisbeth Åberg (1955-1999) had lifted up the flowers in front of a gravestone in Ramneröd cemetery in Uddevalla, I was able to see that the heart-shaped stone rested on two hands (fig. 4-5). This had previously been impossible to observe.

Such conduct by the next of kin gives me an ethical indication that I can, in all likelihood, do the same during fieldwork with a clear conscience even if next of kin

4. A lavish floral decoration placed in front of Lisbeth Åberg's gravestone in Ramneröds Cemetery in Uddevalla. The text on the little stone in front of the flowers reads: "Lisbeth. We will meet again. Anita"

are not present. This I have, in fact, done. As the individualisation of gravestones has become ever more widespread, it has obviously become in the next of kin's interest to have the texts and pictorial symbols visible and to speak of the deceased person with visitors to the cemetery.

The concealing vegetation leads one to consider the advantage of doing fieldwork at other times than the period of growth. This would allow an avoidance of the ethical dilemmas mentioned above. I have sometimes done this, but few people can be encountered at these times with whom the fieldworker can converse. Conducting fieldwork in the winter is also hindered by snow and poorer light for photographs.

5. Lisbeth Åberg's parents have moved all the flowers away from the gravestone to enable the fieldworker to see that the heart-shaped stone rests on two raised hands.

Graveside interviews with persons who have lost a relative

In addition to taking photographs, I have also conducted interviews with the next of kin whom I have met while they care for their graves in the cemeteries. My observations indicate that the newer the grave and the younger the deceased at time of death, the more visits are carried out. I often meet next of kin who have very recently lost a close relative. Conversing about the gravestone alongside the grave itself has been natural, inasmuch as the texts, pictures and objects placed in front of the gravestone lead to many reflections. The external entity materialized in the gravestone and the decoration of the grave have created a basis for conversations on difficult conditions in peoples' lives.

One difference between Norway and Sweden that I have observed is that in Norway the next of kin are not encountered at their relative's graves as often as is the case when doing fieldwork in Swedish cemeteries. People with whom I have spoken in Sweden state that they often visit their relatives' graves during the summer months not only to care for the vegetation, but also to remember their dead. This is especially true of children's and young people's graves, and particularly in the years immediately following the death. I have not observed this frequency of visiting in Norway. Some of the people I have met at places other than cemeteries in Norway and who have recently lost a near relative, have remarked on the difficulty they have in making regular visits to the cemetery. The memory of the deceased does not appear to be so strongly linked to the grave and its care as is the case in Sweden. A straightforward explanation of this difference has not proved possible. In this context, however, it is enough to note the effects that this observed difference has for fieldwork.

As a fieldworker one becomes *emotionally affected* and moved by the texts, pictorial symbols, objects and plants that can be observed and conversed about with near relatives. This is especially true of graves for children and young people, several of whom have died very suddenly. In order to establish a good conversational climate, it is natural to show empathy for the next of kin in their expressions of grief, and not remain entirely neutral and unaffected. Compilation of data must never become an end in itself when one has contact with grieving persons.

Personnel working on gravestones in stone-cutting workshops have also told of similar emotionally charged experiences, although they also point out that it is imperative for those working in this profession to be able to keep others' grief at a certain distance. One representative for a stone-cutting firm in Bohuslän states: "There's a lot of grief in this business. But we can't allow it to touch us too deeply". The ability to express sympathy and to cope psychologically with a difficult situation, which is to say, to show empathy while at the same time keeping a certain distance becomes a challenge even for the fieldworker who has chosen topics that relate to arduous situations in other people's lives. An ability to listen is then essential. In such situations,

one can never appear to be pressed for time, but must instead express interest and participation and clearly show all informants that one's time is at their disposal. From an ethical point of view, it is important to be able to both give and take so that informants do not feel that the fieldworker is interested only in exploiting them.

The choice of topic can obviously be considered from a perspective of research ethics. Bente Gullveig Alver and Ørjar Øyen have conducted a thorough discussion on the question of whether "there are any *research topics* on which research ought not or should not be conducted". They have concluded that "it would be difficult to assert as a *principle* that there are topics on which research can or should be avoided" (Alver and Øyen 1997:59). In my opinion, ethnologists and folklorists should not only study the positive and cheerful aspects of existence, but also have the courage to take up and analyse the problematical in human life even if this places extra demands on fieldworkers. In her research on Norwegian Nazis, Anne Eriksen has arrived at the conclusion that "a cultural field of study should also consider, theoretically and methodologically, the less pleasant aspects of a culture. We cannot merely tidy them away" (Eriksen 1995:31).

At the same time, in my case, one is faced with the ethical question about the extent to which doing research on aspects of other peoples' grief may be seen as being justifiable, and the special considerations that should be observed when conducting such fieldwork. Is one re-opening, in an unethical manner, inner wounds in those persons whom one studies? Reactions of this kind may not become apparent until the day or days following the interview. While conducting interviews in cemeteries I have never observed that any near related informant has begun to cry or to dry their eyes. This, however, I observed during certain earlier periods of fieldwork, such as in Norway in 1985 while documenting memories of the Nazi occupation of the country during World War II.

Can conversation with a fieldworker instead function as a form of support in the process of mourning? This may refer to mourners' gaining an opportunity to express their innermost emotions to an outsider who does not belong to their circle of relatives and friends. My experience as a fieldworker is that people immersed in grief seem to have a need to and a longing for conversing about that which has been and continues to be difficult with an outsider who shows interest in listening to their accounts. Near relatives of children or young people have, when I have questioned them, been very willing to be photographed alongside or behind the gravestone (fig. 3, 6). They have even provided detailed information about the deceased and about the choice of gravestone, texts and pictorial symbols.

My observations are consistent with those made by the landscape architect Inger Berglund during her interviews with numerous next of kin in Sweden in the early 1990s. She noticed that "the next of kin felt a certain relief when talking to neutral out-

siders about their emotions concerning death, funerals and visits to the cemetery" (Berglund 1994:82).

Perhaps we should not, in other words, *evade the difficult* based on an anticipatorily constructed fear of ripping open other people's old wounds with our conversations. The previous tabooing of death once much observed, not the least by the media (Ariès 1978:56ff, Baumann 1992:215ff), or, let us rather say, the fear of speaking about it, appears to be on the verge of being discarded, as has been pointed out by the Danish sociologist Michael Hviid Jacobsen (Jacobsen 2009:15ff). A mental alteration of this kind is particularly noticeable when people are stricken by a near relative's death. In choosing an individualized motif for the gravestone, the next of kin have made a conscious choice. This undoubtedly facilitates a desire to discuss that which has happened.

I sincerely believe that there is now a greater willingness, even among urban individuals, to talk about the personal grief resulting from the death of a near relative than was the case in the early 1980s when I conducted fieldwork on a comparable topic (Gustavsson 1982:16ff). The fieldworker could then encounter comments such as "it is not fitting, but really a kind of abnormal behaviour, this writing a paper on funerals". I concluded then that "inhabitants of towns are especially reluctant to discuss incidents in the closest family". It is now obvious that people no longer are as anxious as before about expressing their innermost emotions. They no longer risk breaking a social norm that once demanded silence or reticence about personal grief. This indicates that norms for what one can discuss with outsiders is situational and changes with the changing times and in changing social settings. The effect of these norms meets the fieldworker in the form of a willingness to converse. The greater candidness with which death and grief are met in both Norway and Sweden can have influenced the praxis one encounters in the field.

The documentation of personal texts written to the deceased

Personally formed, hand-written texts addressed to the deceased are often placed by the next of kin in front of the gravestone. This is done for children, young people and, in some cases, middle-aged persons, but never older people. The material is more perishable than that which is incised on the gravestone. Because these texts are not as long-lasting, they can be exchanged and gradually renewed as they are damaged by wind and weather. This custom takes place during the very first years after a death. Such texts can be found in the areas under study in both Norway and Sweden, and can be written with felt-tip pens on small natural stones or on sheets of paper. These last are often protected against rain by plastic. The deceased is addressed by his/her first name and with the intimate pronoun *you*. Personal emotions relating to the deceased are very conspicuous. Feelings of loss for the one who had died in the past are a no-

ticeable theme, sometimes combined with thoughts of hoping to be reunited, or even in some cases with the return of the deceased. Memories of the past life together are also emphasized. It is often persons from the closest family who write these intimately formed texts, most of which have a personal signature.

A widow from Sarpsborg wrote in the year 2000 to her husband who had been forty years old when he died in 1999: "LOSS. It began like a tear when my heart broke because you had left me and it was so awful. Why did you have to leave? Why can't you come back to us and bring us happiness? Please come back, papa". In this case a photograph of the gravestone cannot be published due to ethical considerations. This would lead to an easy identification of the widow. Persons who have written texts must be protected by being anonymized since the texts are both personal and totally unplanned. Identification cannot be excused on grounds that the texts have been placed in a public area. This, however, does not present a problem to cultural researchers since they are interested in analysing the contents of the texts, not in learning the author's identity.

In addition to the closest family, close friends or families in the deceased's circle of acquaintances can also express their emotions in similar personal texts. These do not reach the same emotional depths as those written by the very closest relatives, however. In July 2000 I found the following hand-written text on a card fastened to flowers on the grave of a young man from the fishing village of Smögen, who had been born in 1974 and died in 1999: "A year has passed. You are with us. We think about you, Johan! We miss you". This was accompanied by a drawing of a ship out at sea, reflecting the fact that the deceased had intended to become a sea captain (fig. 6). According to information given by the deceased's mother, whom I met by the grave, the deceased's comrades had written the text and made the drawing on the first anniversary of his death. Here the author or authors retain their anonymity, allowing a photo to be published without fear of breaking ethical rules. It was enough for me to learn about the relationship of the authors to the deceased during his lifetime from the mother.

If the text has been painted on a smaller stone, it can be preserved much longer than if drawn with a felt-tipped pen. In Lommeland in Bohuslän I found a stone of this type on the grave of an infant girl who had died due to the so-called sudden infant death syndrome in 1993. According to information given by the cemetery caretaker, friends of the deceased's family had written the following text in white paint in connection with the funeral: "6/10 1993, Lommeland Church. Little Lisa, a tiny flower who will stay in our hearts forever"(fig. 7). One need have no misgivings about publishing a photograph of this grave.

People who have died while still of working age have in some cases been given personal texts of this kind, as can be illustrated by the grave of a forty-four year old woman who died in 1999. Her parents told me that a woman, a nursing colleague, had

6. The mother of the deceased Johan Toresson, 1975-1999, sitting alongside his gravestone at Smögen Cemetery in Bohuslän on the first anniversary of his death. His friends had placed a personally worded text in a floral decoration.

7. A natural stone decorates the grave of little Lisa Carlsson at Lommeland Cemetery in Bohuslän. On the smaller stone to the right, family friends had written at the funeral: "6/10 1993. Little Lisa, a tiny flower who will stay in our hearts forever".

placed not only a porcelain cat on the grave but also a smaller stone on which the text "Lisbeth. We'll meet again" and "Anita", had been written with a felt pen (fig. 5). Because it will not be possible to identify this Anita, a photograph of the gravestone can thus be published.

Ethically speaking, one might ask oneself about the legitimacy of a fieldworker's reading and documenting such personal and intimate texts which can also be felt to be emotionally moving. I have had certain qualms, despite these texts having been placed in cemeteries that are public areas. No-one can therefore ever assume that anything placed there can remain private, but must realize that everything is open to general observation. The next step concerns the legitimacy of documenting what has been written down. The most important criteria in documentation is that the author's identity must remain anonymous.

The fact that numerous next of kin with whom I have spoken at the grave have not kept such texts secret, but have instead shown them and spoken of them, I have interpreted as meaning that texts written by the next of kin are not considered to be completely secret. These conversations have contributed to my not feeling conscience-stricken when I transcribe and analyse such coincidental texts. One gains a closer conception of the experiencing of grief without the risk of exposing any individual person.

II Ethics and memorial websites on the Internet

The new Internet media, including memorial websites, have led to wholly new perspectives on ethical questions about private and public spheres when compared to previously held opinions (Hannemyr 2009). A new trend shows that many people actually wish to be open and visible on the Internet (Brandtzæg 2009). At the same time, there are no established rules as to how questions of privacy protection should be dealt with at present. The scholar should therefore think carefully about considerations which should be respected regarding personal integrity and anonymity. In my sample of memorial websites, I have studied those that are open to the public. I have avoided those that are available only to a limited circle or for which the guest must log on. The scholar would act unethically as a spy if she or he logged on and became a member of such closed sites merely to observe and record, not to contribute a personal message.

Respect for anonymity is vital, seeing that I study persons who write messages without their being aware of this. Anonymity in this study is dealt with by omitting the surname of message writers in my text. Writers, at least those that express themselves in guestbook messages, usually only use their first names. Those who are easiest to identify are the mothers of dead children and young people because these latter are indicated not only by their first and last names, but also with a photograph. Their

friends cannot be identified, however, nor can all those writers not personally acquainted with the deceased. For these reasons there should be no ethical obstacle to reproducing direct quotations (see, however, Fjell 2005:186).

Newspapers in both Norway and Sweden publish extracts from Facebook messages in connection with fatal accidents. On 9 March 2010 the Norwegian newspaper *VG* ran a column entitled "Facebook greetings" about a drowning accident in which two young girls from Kristiansand died. One should also allow for the fact that those who create memorial websites for close relatives who have died often express the hope that the deceased will be remembered, not forgotten. This indicates a stronger desire for public attention than for anonymity. Mari-Ann Thörnström lost her son Marcus in 2002 when he was 20 years old. She has written several poems on the memorial site www.tillminneavmarcus.dinstudio.se (in memory of marcus) giving several instructions to anyone wishing to quote her poems: "If you want to borrow my poems, I ask only that both my and Marcus' names are placed under the poem I wrote. Grateful if you respect me here". This is why I have chosen to mention her name when citing one of her poems. Messages on memorial websites usually include a photograph of the deceased, often a whole series of photos taken during the deceased's life. These I have chosen not to publish because this would make identification easier.

Studies on the Internet give a greater physical distance to the mourners than if the scholar conducts interviews face to face. The ethnologist Britta Lundgren has done just this with in-depth interviews with eight grieving women a short time after they had lost their husband or a child in an accident. The informants had voluntarily indicated interest and the resulting conversations proved very emotionally charged (Lundgren 2006). The interviews can have aided in the process of mourning, but they can also have reopened and even worsened the interviewees' emotional wounds. This is not a risk in fieldwork on the Internet. There people express themselves spontaneously without having been asked. The scholar does not create her sources as is done in an interview. At the same time, one might ask oneself about the ethical justification for conducting research on others' grief and, in my case, without their even being aware of it. What is most important is that the scholar consciously tries to avoid mental harm to those who are being studied. They themselves may feel consoled by speaking with an outsider about personal sorrow, as I experienced during fieldwork on symbols on gravestones in cemeteries in both Norway and Sweden.

As a cultural scholar one cannot escape being affected psychologically when reading all the extremely sorrowful and emotional messages on memorial websites. The scholar's power of insight and feelings of empathy are vital to the ability for familiarizing oneself with and interpreting the experiences of those persons who write of their often despairing emotions.

In conclusion it should be said that through the examples recorded in this chapter, I have wished to show how important it is for the fieldworker to be conscious of ethical research perspectives and to discuss those considerations of ethical character that must be observed both in connection with the documentation and with the adaptation and publication of the results of the research.

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Internet

www.tillminneavmarcus.din studio.se

6
Symbols on feline graves in a comparative perspective: Sweden, France and Portugal

The value of domestic animals in peasant society was associated with agricultural production. This also applied to dogs and cats. Such animals were not thought of as being primarily pets. Cats were kept to control the number of rats and mice. Nor was there any ceremony connected with the death of cats; the dead animals were instead often buried in a dung pit or rubbish tip. Eccentric persons were the only ones to make something ceremonious out of the death of a cat. An eccentric man of this kind who lived between 1865 and 1947, and who is mentioned in the oral tradition of western Sweden, made zinc caskets for his cats when they died. This gave rise to considerable mocking commentary among his neighbours. There is no information in Norwegian and Swedish ethnological archives about how dead animals of this kind were dealt with. I have, however, collected some information in a number of interviews.

The situation was different in towns and cities, compared to rural districts, because there animals have had a completely different social function (Broberg 2005, Pollard 2003). When city animals died, they were treated more respectfully than in rural districts and could even be placed in a box for burial. In recent years, cremation has become common. Veterinary clinics also provide coffins for dead pets (Ernblad and Kronqvist 2001:167, 172). Special animal graveyards did not, however, appear in Sweden in any great number until the late 1900s. There are some few graveyards on the European continent whose origins reach back to the 1800s. The history of these graveyards has been presented by the Norwegian ethnologist Liv Emma Thorsen (Thorsen 2002).

In this chapter I intend to consider not only the visual symbols and texts on stones or metal plates and other objects placed on feline graves in western Sweden, but also the care and maintenance of these graves during the summer and winter months. A comparison can then be made with the symbolic expressions, texts and care of graves in a few selected animal graveyards on the Continent. What are the similarities and differences that can be observed in a continental European perspective concerning pets? A comparison with human graves in western Sweden in recent years can also be of in-

terest. I have in chapter 2 analysed such graves in western Sweden and southern Norway. This analysis can provide comparative material for utilization in this study. How are borderlines maintained or eradicated, as the case may be, when people of our day and age wish to express memories, bereavement and grief having to do with a deceased person and/or a pet? Can an anthropomorphization of grief occur?

Each animal graveyard has a list of regulations that pet owners must abide by. The purpose of such regulations is to differentiate between the graves of human beings and pets. For this reason many animal graveyards in Sweden and Germany (Guthke 2003/1) attempt to prohibit the use of crosses or other religious symbols on graves. The animal graveyards at Djurgården in Stockholm and the Franciscan burial ground in Örebro, however, actually permit the use of religious symbols (Arnström 2005).

Animal graveyards are an obviously urban phenomenon in Sweden. In larger urban centres that lack animal graveyards, there are several instances of proposals being submitted to and meetings held with the municipal administration urging the establishment of a graveyard of this kind. In western Sweden alone such efforts were made in the towns of Alingsås, Stenungsund, Vänersborg and Uddevalla at the beginning of the present century. In 2003, the municipal administration of Uddevalla received a delegation that presented a petition containing 601 signatures requesting an animal graveyard (*Bohusläningen*, 17 December 2003). No graveyard has as yet been established, however.

The four animal graveyards that I have studied all lie in western Sweden (Lysekil, Lilla Edet, Trollhättan and Backa on the outskirts of Gothenburg). These sites have for the most part existed only for a few decades. The oldest of them, at Lilla Edet, was established as early as 1962. The graveyards in Backa near Gothenburg were built in 1985, in Trollhättan in 1987 and in Lysekil in 1995. The names of these animal graveyards vary. The one in Trollhättan is called ‘Memorial Site for Domestic Animals’ while the one in Lilla Edet is called ‘The Animal Memorial Grove’. The towns in question allocate burial sites, coordinate the registry of graves and usually provide some assistance with the burials. Idealistic organizations, such as the animal welfare association in Lilla Edet and the Burial Association for Pets in Gothenburg, can be given responsibility for operations. The animal welfare association in Helsingborg also carries out the same duties as the one in Lilla Edet (Ernblad and Kronqvist 2001:173). The right to use the burial plot is usually limited to five years and requires the payment of a certain fee. After the first five-year period, this right can be extended for additional periods of five years upon payment of an additional fee. The burial plots in Lysekil can be used free of charge, but here no assistance is offered for digging the grave. The right to use the plot is not limited in time.

Animal graveyards are far more infrequent in Norway than in Sweden (Thorsen 2001). I have found it impossible to discover any that still are in use. There was one

privately owned animal graveyard in Lunner municipality in Hadeland County north of Oslo in use during the 1990s. Its owners had been inspired to establish this graveyard by similar ones in Sweden. The dead pets who were buried here, mostly dogs and cats, came from the whole of the Oslo region. Horizontal natural stones were used to mark the graves and on them the woman owner painted the animal's name, birth and death dates and a personal text, such as 'Deepest thanks'. This operation ceased around the year 2000 as the demand for burial plots diminished markedly when cremation of dead pets became possible in Norway. This animal graveyard is now overgrown and the painted texts are difficult to read. I have therefore not attempted to take any photographs there. There is also an abandoned animal graveyard near the city of Voss in western Norway which was used by people from the Bergen area during the 1990s (Thorsen 2002:28). In Norway, in contrast to Sweden, owners are allowed to bury their dead pets in their own gardens. Thus there is not the same evident demand for the establishment and utilization of animal graveyards as in Sweden. In an internet guest book set up in Norway for a deceased cat in 2006, the owner wrote that her seven-year-old cat Teo "was cremated and now rests under the apple tree in the woods behind our house" (www.freewebs.com). The absence of animal graveyards in Norway has meant that I was not able to compare feline graves in Sweden and Norway as I could earlier when studying human graves. In this study I have instead focused my comparative observations on continental Europe where extensive equivalent material may be found. Those that I have studied are an animal graveyard in Asnières sur Seine in Paris (established in 1899) and one in Lisbon named 'Zoo'.

1 Visual expression

A Symbols

An important aspect of this investigation is an ascertaining of the prominent features of the *symbols* used in the animal graveyards studied in Sweden and on the Continent. It is appropriate to begin with the town of *Lilla Edet* since its graveyard was established in 1962, long before any of the other Swedish graveyards included here. One common form for decoration is made up of small stones laid in a ring around the grave. Crushed gravel enclosed by a wooden framework can also be used. There are some instances of horizontal natural stones. These can be decorated with painted flowers, as for example the two naturalistic roses on the grave of the cat Baloo, nicknamed 'Monito', that lived between 1986 and 2000 (figure 1).

Affection for the cat Zita (1992-2004) is expressed by means of two red hearts painted on above and below its name. Zita lies in the same grave as Missen (1980-1988) and Jocke (1996-2001). Their names are inscribed on a metal plate on the grave

1. *A pair of red-painted roses on the horizontal natural stone memorializing the cat Baloo, nicknamed 'Monito', at the animal graveyard in Lilla Edet. Smaller stones have been laid in a ring around the grave. Decorative flowers have been placed within this ring and alongside the natural stone. Photo: Johan Gustavsson.*

2. *The names Zita, Missen and Jocke have been painted on a vertical, white-painted wooden cross and inscribed on a metal plate lying on a grave at Lilla Edet's animal graveyard. The name Zita is enclosed in two red hearts painted on the wooden cross and the text "My best friend" on the metal plate. "The Andersson Family, Göta" are given as the owners. A wooden framework encloses the gravel which covers the grave. Photo: Johan Gustavsson.*

3. *A cross surrounded by rays of light as found on a stone slab for "Our faithful, beloved" Toker at Lilla Edet's animal graveyard. A flowering plant has been placed above the slab. "The Kielow Wahlström family" are named as the owners. Photo: Johan Gustavsson.*

and also on a vertical, white-painted wooden cross (figure 2). This is one of two crosses found at this graveyard.

The use of the cross as a symbol clearly contributes to obliterate the distinction between human beings and pets. One should note the choice of a white, not a black cross. The white cross has increasingly replaced the black one on human graves in Sweden in recent years precisely because emphasis is placed on the lighter aspects of death instead of the darker ones (see chapter 2). The second cross at this graveyard is found on a horizontal stone in remembrance of the cat Toker (1969-1978). It is considerably older and expresses Christian belief in that it is surrounded by radiant beams (figure 3). These two crosses can be considered as the type of obvious religious symbols that the graveyard administration actually advises against (see above). Such religious symbolism tends to play down or obliterate the borderline between animals and human beings.

The animal graveyard in the industrial city of *Trollhättan* was established in 1987, twenty five years later than the one at Lilla Edet some 20 kilometres away. Here there are some examples of encircling burial plots with small stones. Inscribed or painted flowers such as lily-of-the-valley or a heart as a symbol of love can also be found on the horizontal natural stones commonly used at the Trollhättan graveyard. The only symbols having a religious association are a couple of vertical wooden crosses. No vertical stones can, on the other hand, be found. One of the crosses found here relates to the cat Pepsi that died in 2004 at an age of eleven years. This cross is supplemented with a framed photograph of the cat and two figurines, one larger and one smaller, of cats (figure 4).

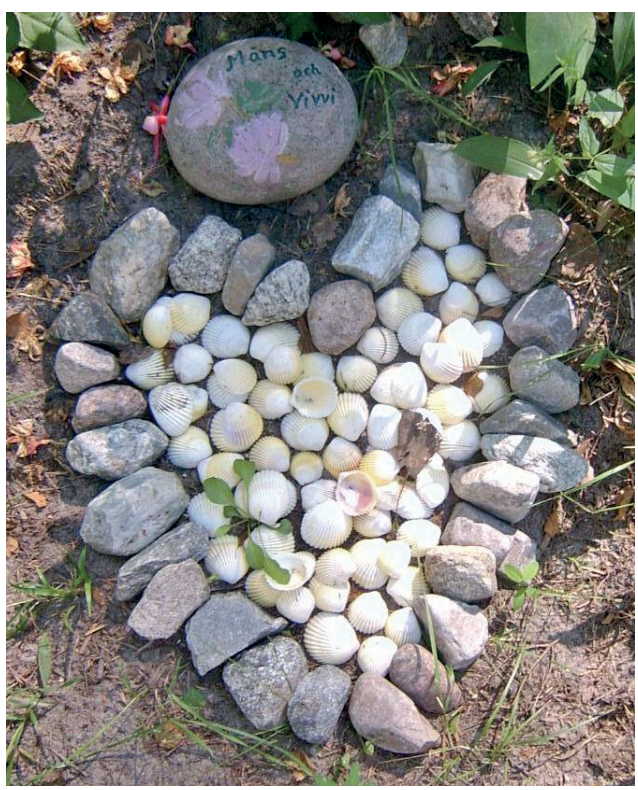
4. *A vertical wooden cross at Trollhättan's animal graveyard with the text "Missing you". A framed photo of the cat Pepsi has been placed in front of the cross along with a larger and a smaller pottery figurines of cats. Photo: Anders Gustavsson.*

5. *The text "Our beloved cat KLEO" and an outline drawing in black of the twenty-year-old cat has been painted on a horizontal natural stone at Trollhättan's animal graveyard. Photo: Anders Gustavsson.*

There is a greater variation and wealth of symbols at Trollhättan compared with Lilla Edet. These sometimes consist of framed photographs of the particular cat. A drawing of the cat in felt pen or paintbrush or an inscription on the stone can also be found (figure 5).

A free-standing china or pottery cat figurine has been placed on some graves at Trollhättan. Here there is also considerably greater similarity with examples that have been found in Paris and Lisbon (see below) than is the case at Lilla Edet. This difference can have come about both because the animal graveyard at Trollhättan is newer and because the pet owners there may have accepted and adapted new impulses, not the least due to the emergent common practise on gravestones commemorating human beings. The greatest changes on these latter gravestones have taken place from the 1990s and on, as increasing individualism has made itself felt. It is at this time that the very first photographs of deceased persons begin to be seen (see chapter 2). This custom is still, however, used to a far less extent than has long been the case on the Continent, such as in France and Portugal.

Mention should also be made of the fact that the relationship between human and cat has also begun to be expressed in recent years by using the picture of a cat in announcements of human deaths and sometimes on gravestones (chapter 2). These cat pictures in death announcements are sometimes combined with a Christian text, such as a psalm. One should not au-



6. *The names of the cats Måns and Vivvi have been written on a horizontal natural stone on which pink flowers have also been painted at Lysekil's animal graveyard. Numerous white seashells have been placed within the heart-shaped ring of stones on the plot. Photo: Anders Gustavsson.*

tomatically consider the use of this type of picture as expressing an increasing secularization.

Lysekil is the smallest and newest of the Swedish graveyards to have been investigated in the present survey. Here there are many similarities not only to Trollhättan but also to Lilla Edet. Some few horizontal wooden crosses can be seen lying beside natural stones. Unlike Trollhättan, no photographs of cats are to be found. The manager of the graveyard is careful about sustaining the distinction between humans and animals. In addition to similarities with other animal graveyards, some specific distinctive features appear that are specific to Lysekil. Any flower painted on a natural stone is usually a honeysuckle, the official flower of Bohuslän province. White seashells can be found within the circle of small stones around the burial plot (figure 6), something that indicates the graveyard's location in a coastal district.

The graves at *Backa* in Gothenburg all have horizontal stones to which a little metal plate has been fastened. This leads to all graves having a nearly identical appearance in contrast to the other graveyards in which natural stones can also be found. These latter, which are of varying appearance, are easy to decorate, something that is not possible on the metal plates at Backa. I observed only a few graves with depictions of cats; one was a photograph of a cat while

7. *Two vertical stones placed on a horizontal stone slab in memory of two cats at the animal graveyard in Paris. The stone to the left is decorated with a framed picture of the cat alongside two engraved golden hearts. The cat is not named. The name Daisy is inscribed on the other stone where there is no picture, but instead a bronze flower, a spike of corn and the text "Souvenir". Photo: Anders Gustavsson.*

others were china cat figurines. This means that pictures and china figurines of cats in Sweden are most commonly found at Trollhättan. Nor can many decorations be found at Backa either, with the exception of some red-painted hearts that are occasionally seen lying on top of a stone. A teddy bear made of stone has also been observed.

At the animal graveyard in *Paris* I have examined feline graves dating to the 1980s and later. Here there are vertical, usually rectangular stones about one-half metre high. A white stone slab on which several types of flowers and leaves had been painted was attached to one such vertical stone. There is generally a colour picture of the deceased cat in a rectangular or oval frame imprinted on the stone. This is also a feature of gravestones commemorating humans in France. Pictorial symbols are not very common on feline graves. These can take the shape of two engraved hearts (figure 7) symbolizing love, a bronze cat, a bronze flower or a pair of bronze birds. There are some examples of china or bronze figurines of cats placed in front of the graves. I observed a china figure of an angel on one of the graves. This was the only association to religion that I observed.

In *Lisbon*, just as in Paris, the cat is usually depicted in a colour photograph with a rectangular or oval frame. A china cat figurine in front of the gravestone also appears in which case the colour photograph of the cat is in some cases omitted. A horizontal stone can be combined with a vertical stone. There is a striking similarity in surface features between Paris and Lisbon. Only one symbol with religious associations has been observed in Lisbon's animal graveyard. This is a cross on the grave of a dog.

B Texts

One can ask oneself what *factual information* about the cat and its owners is presented by means of the texts on the graves. At Lilla Edet, the majority of the graves have horizontal metal plates fastened to an underlying stone slab. The names of the cat and the owning family and, in several cases, the home municipality are stated along with the cat's birth and death dates. The names of several cats can be found on the same plate, indicating that they have belonged to the same family and died at different times. At Lysekil, however, the cat's birth and death dates are usually not stated, only its name. The little metal plates at the animal graveyard in Gothenburg list the cat's name, age and year of death. Numerous metal plates can often be observed alongside one another when one and the same family has owned several cats that have died from 1985 onwards. Dogs can also be buried in the same burial plots as cats (figure 8), something that I have not observed at the other animal graveyards.

In Paris the cat's name, birth date and death date are inscribed, often in golden letters, on the approximately half-metre-high vertical stone. Horizontal stones have in

8. *Three dogs and four cats that died between 1987 and 2001 have been buried in the same plot at the animal graveyard at Backa in Gothenburg. Photo: Anders Gustavsson.*

some few cases been provided with texts. There are some instances of several cats being named on the same stone, indicating that they have belonged to the same family. Specifying the cat's name, birthday and death day, and not only the year of its birth and death, is ordinarily done on the vertical stone in Lisbon.

Texts expressing the owners' emotions are also of significance. Remembrance, love, thankfulness and comradeship are emphasized at Lilla Edet. The cat Zita, that lived between 1992 and 2004, is described as being "My best pal" (figure 2). This indicates both an intense relationship with the human owner and a tendency towards a greater lessening of the borderline between human beings and pets.

The texts on the stones at Trollhättan express love, sorrow, loss and remembrance in a similar manner as at Lilla Edet. One text states, for example, "You will always have a place in our hearts". The texts appearing on some of the horizontal stones at Lysekil emphasize remembrance and love. The little metal plates at the graveyard in Gothenburg do not have space for more than the basic facts about the cat: its name, age and year of death.

Other texts in addition to names and dates are not always found in Paris, but they can occur. The message in those texts that do appear expresses remembrance, loss, ap-

9. *The cat Minou depicted here at the animal graveyard in Paris is referred to as "Treasure" and "Our dear". It will always remain in its owners' hearts. Photo: Anders Gustavsson.*

preciation, gratitude and love, such as "In our hearts forever" (figure 9). They thus show a great similarity to the Swedish gravestones.

More texts can be observed on gravestones in Lisbon than in Paris or Sweden. These texts especially express loss, love, comradeship and unforgettable or even eternal remembrance. "Your loving masters remember you and miss you eternally", is what the owners of the cat Peluche (1985-1994) wrote, according to the English translation from the Portuguese. The friendship existing between owner and cat, and which death has brought to a stop, was expressed in the following manner to the cat Bamby (1982-1997): "You were a great friend, intelligent, always playful, always alert to our footsteps throughout the 14 years of your life". The experience of

10. *A framed photograph of the cat Fofinha and a text on both the vertical and the horizontal stones at the animal graveyard Zoo in Lisbon. Photo: Maria Santa Vieira Montez.*

11. *This particular Fofinha is thought to have a soul that its owner hopes shall rest in peace. A large bouquet of flowers has been placed behind the vertical stone with a china cat figurine placed alongside the horizontal stone at the animal graveyard Zoo in Lisbon. Photo: Maria Santa Vieira Montez.*

fellowship with the cat can be considered to have continued even after its death. "I feel your absence every day. Whenever I am sad, I feel your presence", the owner of the cat Fofinha (1988-2000) wrote on the vertical gravestone. This is an expression of a diffuse idea of life after death comparable to that in neoreligious lines of thought. At this same grave there is a horizontal stone bearing an excerpt from a poem by the French poet Saint Exupéry: "In a world which became a desert. We are looking forward to meeting a friend" (figure 10).

In this instance the point of view is actually focused towards the future, but obviously religious elements are not found on the gravestones in Lisbon. A slight exception is represented by a stone whose inscription indicates that the cat has a soul. The text "May your soul rest in peace" can be found on the stone commemorating a different Fofinha (1988-2000) than the one previously mentioned (figure 11).[16]

2 Maintenance of the graves

A summer season

Fieldwork at Lilla Edet, Trollhättan and Lysekil was carried out during the summer

16. The author wishes to thank the sociologist and translator Maria Santa Vieira Montez of Lisbon who has photographed the gravestones in Lisbon and translated their texts into English.

12. *A cat's grave handsomely decorated with flowers at the animal graveyard in Trollhättan. A ring of stones encircles the flowers while a china cat figurine has been placed in the background. Photo: Anders Gustavsson.*

of 2005, and at Backa during the spring of 2007. The graves at Lilla Edet were on the whole well cared for and decorated with flowers and green plants. Where natural stones are used, potted plants can be set inside the ring of stones (figure 1). In the case of horizontal stones, flowers can be planted in front of the stone (figure 3).

The floral decorations at Trollhättan were striking (figure 12). Both potted plants and bouquets in vases were observed. A middle-aged couple with whom I spoke stated that they came there at least every other week to care for the flowers. It was difficult to observe any obvious differences concerning the care of human and animal graves.

Lavish floral decorations in vases or pots were placed in front of the vertical stones at the graveyard in Paris. These all appeared well-cared-for at the time when fieldwork was carried out during the autumn of 2001 (figure 7). It is obvious that much concern was given to having the flowers appear well-tended. Because there was no space for planting flowers in the earth, the owners had to make continual visits to the graveyard.

Flowers in vases were usually placed behind horizontal stones combined with a vertical stone in Lisbon. This indicates that the graves are visited regularly and are well cared for by the animals' owners, something that was confirmed by the person in charge of the graveyard's maintenance. No withered flowers could be observed during the summer period of 2002 when the sociologist Maria Santa Vieira Montez conducted her fieldwork (figure 11).

13. *A woman from Västra Frölunda in Gothenburg places a winter wreath and lights a candle lantern in memory of her three cats who died between 1989 and 2003. Photographed by Anders Gustavsson on the day before All Saints' Day 2006 at the animal graveyard at Backa in Gothenburg.*

B At All Saints' Day and in the winter season

In order to illustrate a different season than summer, I carried out fieldwork at the animal graveyard at Backa in Gothenburg around All Saints' Day in 2006. I was able to observe domestic heather and other autumn flowers even though the new-fallen snow that blanketed the graves made fieldwork difficult. The intention of my visit was to study how the most important period of the year for the decoration and care of graves was expressed at an animal graveyard. In this regard I was struck by the noticeable similarities between the activities at human and at animal graves. Many owners came there to arrange winter wreathes, evergreen boughs and small lanterns containing lighted candles (figure 13). This corresponds to what is done on human graves.

I conducted another period of fieldwork in Trollhättan in March 2007 in order to observe the extent of decoration and maintenance during the winter. Evergreen

boughs and winter wreathes were numerous. Some of the extinguished candle lanterns had been left on the graves in Trollhättan during the summer. Interviews that I conducted at the graveyard at Backa indicated that Easter was another important occasion for decoration, at which time massive numbers of daffodils were left in place.

A concluding comparative perspective

Using specific examples from animal graveyards, and focusing on western Sweden, this chapter has given illustrations of the emotional intimacy between people and their pets as this is expressed in recent years in connection with the death of the pet. The texts and pictorial symbols that are utilized become a method for managing the grief and sense of loss that can be experienced over a period of years. The expressions of grief in Sweden, in contrast to Norway, have begun to assume a form that increasingly resembles the words, pictorial symbols and grave decorations, the maintenance of the grave and the online texts that are employed when a human being dies. One might actually speak of an anthropomorphic process regarding these recent forms of grief. This applies to names, years of birth and death, and varying floral symbols and heart-shaped motifs on the gravestones. The local or regional affiliation can also be shown by means of the honeysuckle blossom and sea-shell in Lysekil (figure 6).

Religiously oriented motifs have also begun to be observed in Sweden, in contrast to what can be found on the European continent in France and Portugal. This not only relates to crosses, but also to angel motifs having a neoreligious tendency. The cross as a symbol has to a certain degree begun to be found at animal graveyards, even if such symbolism is not considered desirable by the organizations and municipalities that are responsible for them. Owners of cats, however, take their own lines in many cases. This should be regarded as expressing the increasing individualization that is also applicable to human graves in Sweden during the 1990s.

What are, of course, missing on animal graves are those symbols telling of occupations or leisure time activities which have recently received an ever-increasing attention on human graves in Sweden. Natural stones, which are never found on feline graves on the Continent, are used in Sweden just as their use on human graves in this country has become increasingly common. One difference that applies to feline graves as compared to human graves is that gravestones are not placed vertically, something that is common on the Continent (see above). Vertical gravestones have been the most common on human graves while horizontal stones are a later phenomenon. This innovation has also been applied to animal graves, something that in its turn has contributed to a lessening of the differences between these and human graves.

Care and maintenance of animal graves during both the summer and winter seasons do not deviate markedly from care given to human graves in Sweden. In both cases, there are floral decorations in the summer, and grave lanterns with burning candles, evergreen boughs and wreathes in wintertime.

The international sections of this study have shown that developments in Sweden concur in several respects with what is done in other European countries, even if animal graveyards farther south in Europe are, generally speaking, far older than their Swedish counterparts. In southern Europe, both horizontal and vertical gravestones can be seen on the same grave. Vertical stones have, as I have pointed out, not been observed in Sweden, but instead all the more natural stones, which are not found in the southern areas of the Continent. Use of the cross is found considerably less often, while pictures of the animals and of humans on human graves are all the more often found compared with Sweden. Diffuse thoughts concerning a life after death in a neo-religious spirit can be found in certain cases in the texts on the gravestones on the Continent. Bronze figurines on human graves, something that is unusual in Sweden but fairly common in Norway, are even more common on both animal and human graves on the Continent.

Unprinted sources

Fieldwork conducted by the author in 2001 at the animal graveyard Asnières sur Seine in Paris

Fieldwork conducted by Maria Santa Vieira Montez in 2002 at the animal graveyard Zoo in Lisbon

Fieldwork conducted by the author in the summer of 2005 at the Swedish animal graveyards in Lilla Edet, Lysekil and Trollhättan. In Trollhättan also during the winter of 2007

Fieldwork conducted by the author around All Saints' Day in 2006 and during the spring of 2007 at the animal graveyard at Backa in Gothenburg

Interviews conducted by the author in 2007 with the owners of the discontinued animal graveyard at Lunner in Hadeland, Norway

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7
Rituals around sudden death in recent years

The life of every human being extends from birth to death. Death can sometimes accompany birth when an expected child is stillborn or miscarried earlier in pregnancy. In all other cases, life is expected to proceed through childhood, youth, adulthood and old age. In former times, this process was illustrated in mass-produced pictures showing the successive ages of a woman and a man (eg Bringéus 1988). Life reached its end with death after a person had become aged and infirm. Even though average life expectancy has risen markedly during the past decades, death still marks the end. No one can escape this fate even if death has often been said to have become subject to taboo, and has become marginalized in people's social lives. This concurs with the argumentation given by the French historian Phillippe Ariès (1978). The idea of such marginalization has, however, been criticized by other scholars, such as the Swedish ethnologist Lynn Åkesson (1997) and the Danish sociologist Michael Hviid Jacobsen (Jacobsen 2009). The English sociologist Zygmunt Bauman (1994) argues that human beings strive for immortality in different ways. Death will be more easily shoved aside as relating to a date in distant future when the individual will have become old and frail.

What happens then if death occurs at an earlier phase of life and not at a far distant time? Most often, this will be a sudden and unexpected death. How do the nearest family, friends and acquaintances of the deceased cope with this? How and why are new rituals created, how are they spread, and what meaning do they have for those people who are thrust into difficult situations? These are questions that will be discussed in this chapter. The emphasis is on the present day.

Ritual presupposes the performance of actions and the repeating and carrying out of these actions in a public social context (eg Klein 1995). The action also have a deeper symbolic meaning for the participants.

The fieldwork for this study, consisting of interviews, observations and photography, was carried out in southeastern Norway and in the province of Bohuslän in western Sweden. Articles in Norwegian and Swedish newspapers have also been important sources.

1 Loss of life at sea

Being dependent on one's income from working at the open sea must be associated with obvious dangers of shipwreck and death by drowning. This became only too evident in the coastal villages of the western coast of Sweden when extensive deep-sea fishing started in the 1860s. Fishing boats were powered by sail until being equipped with engines in the 1890s. This improvement led to a reduction in the risk of accidents. The 1880s were especially plagued by accidents. During the 1900s, the two World Wars also meant great risk for people living along the coast because shipwrecks could be caused by the explosion of submerged mines.

Psychologically speaking, it was felt to be an even greater tragedy if the dead were not buried in consecrated ground. In this case, the next of kin, widows, mothers and children, had no place on which to focus their grief and no grave to tend. In addition, popular superstition held that bodies not buried in consecrated ground could become ghosts and be a danger to the living if met unexpectedly (af Klintberg 1973, Pentikäinen 1974). Nor was it possible to hold a funeral service if the body had not been found. The popular term used along Sweden's west coast was that the drowned men were "lost".

Anxiety regarding shipwreck was naturally very prevalent among the fishermen's wives. In addition to the mental shock and grief, the loss of the family's breadwinner would devastate the basis of the household's economy. Having to live with the constant fear meant that a tight social relationship between the women was vital. Their ability to console and support each other was of immense importance when one of them, or as it happened only too often, several women in the same village had lost a

1. A fishing boat sailing in to home port with the top of its sail lowered as a sign telling of a fatal accident. Painting by Carl Gustaf Bernhardson. Bohuslän Museum, no. 270.

husband and one or more sons. Before the day of the telephone and telegraph, men arriving home and sailing into their home port would show grief and bereavement by lowering their ship's sails if one or more of the crew had been lost. The men, however, were forced to go out to sea in their boats even in the combat conditions of the two World Wars (Åberg & Edvardsson 1985). On being interviewed, the fishermen stated that they had no other choice because of the need to sustain their families. They could still feel that their women were in an even more difficult situation in that they lived with constant uncertainty. The men, on the other hand, in the midst of the reality of the sea, were completely engrossed in their work. Under such circumstances, they had little time to spend worrying about possible accidents.

Religion frequently became a source of comfort and refuge for the anxious and sorrowing women. One fisherman's wife, from the island of Öckerö near Gothenburg, who had lost two young sons when their boat hit a submerged mine, told of her reaction on learning of the disaster: "... went home and sat down all alone. And then something odd happened. A bible verse that I had repeated time and time again entered my mind, 'Thy heart shall not be troubled nor forlorn...'" (Åberg & Edvardsson 1985:100)

Shipwrecks at sea have sometimes provided a psychological basis for religious revivals in a locality. This can occur when charismatic revivalist preachers have come to a coastal village in connection with terrible disasters. The preachers' sermonizing served to remind the local people of eternity that had been made relevant by the deaths due to shipwreck (Gustavsson 1984:32ff). When the widows of these drowned fishermen eventually died, often many years later, they were buried in single graves in the churchyard provided they had not re-married. The epitaph on the gravestone simply used the word "Wife" without any mention of the husband's name. The woman's status as a widow has been marked on gravestones in later years. An inscription on a gravestone in Mollösund Cemetery, for a woman who died in 1966, reads that she was "the Widow of Joakim Patriksson who died in the shipwreck of the Orion in 1924". A woman from Sydkoster had been a widow for even longer, as can be seen from the inscription on her gravestone from 1992: "Wife of Axel Antonsson who drowned in Koster Fjord in 1934".

Many years after local families had experienced these terrible disasters, the idea of raising a common memorial stone in the cemetery began to be discussed in some villages along the coast of Bohuslän. The names of all those lost at sea since the start of deep-sea fishing were to be inscribed in chronological order while their ages were also given in many cases. This has made it possible to determine the number of young and middle-aged men from the various coastal villages who had lost their lives at sea, and to see that many died at about the same time. The dominant position of the 19th century as to the number of deaths can be seen, for example, on the memorial in

Bohus-Malmön. 38 out of a total of 48 men drowned during the second half of the 1800s.

The memorials were raised to ensure that the names of the dead would never be forgotten and also that they would always have a place in local history even if their final resting place lay at the bottom of the sea. The earliest recorded memorial stones of this kind were put up in the 1950s, such as those in Gullholmen in 1952 and Åstol in 1958. Soon afterwards, stones were erected in Rönnäng in 1960 and Kungshamn in 1965. The initiative in these cases was taken by the local fishermen themselves. The stone in Kungshamn is inscribed to that effect: "Kungshamn's fishermen put up this stone in the year 1965". It was in these years, particularly in the 1960s, that extensive deep-sea fishing came to an end in the villages of Bohuslän.

There were, however, still many coastal villages without memorials in the 1990s. Several were erected in different places within a short period of time. Much of the local populace rapidly became interested in making oral tradition about the disasters tangible and visible. Such memorials were put up in Bohus-Malmön and Käringön in 1993, followed by Mollösund and Bovallstrand in 1994 and Öckerö in 1998. The newest memorials recorded are those erected in Resö in 2000, Lyse in 2002 (fig. 2) and Hunnebostrand in 2011. Local newspapers showed great interest in these events, printing long articles about the reasons for raising the various memorials and their dedications. Such articles have given other local communities an incentive to erect new memorials. Many of these latest memorials have been put up through the efforts of local historical societies. This is due to a wish to emphasize the importance that the dead men had in local history despite their not having been buried in their home ground. They would no longer remain anonymous, but were at last to be visibly remembered and honoured for their work at sea on behalf of their home communities. On Käringön, a total of 157 men were honoured. After the ceremony in 1993, one of the older wives of island fishermen, who had been instrumental in raising the memorial, said "it was a moving experience to see that memorial for all those who did not return. Now they have come home at last. ... There were tragedies connected to each and every name. My own forefathers were lost at sea. That was something every single family on Käringön experienced. Now everyone has a place to visit" (*Bohusläningen*, 22 May 1993).

Extensive archival research has been carried out by enthusiastic local historians to ensure the inclusion of every possible name on the stone so that none would be forgotten. Oral tradition was not sufficient in this reconstruction of the shipwrecks that had occurred in the latter part of the 1800s. At the time of the consecration ceremony for the Mollösund memorial in the summer of 1994, the newspaper *Bohusläningen* reported, "Majken Rohdén has completed the weighty task of finding all the names of the deceased. She has also made a list of all their next of kin" (*Bohusläningen*, 30 July 1994). The inscription on the Mollösund memorial reads: "Storm and strife gave

2. The memorial stone erected in 2002 in Lyse cemetery in commemoration of fishermen and mariners who were lost at sea during 1876–1908 and 1909–1950. Photo by Anders Gustavsson.

them a grave at sea". Below the inscription are listed the names of the 48 men who died at sea between 1861 and 1994. That last date marks the drowning of a man in the sinking of ferry MS Estonia in the Baltic Sea.

The dedication ceremonies have been conducted by clergymen with the participation of local historians, former fishermen and seamen (fig. 3). The names of all the dead victims are read out and a wreath placed in front of the memorial. The clergymen's participation gives a spiritual dimension to the ceremony similar to that taking place at an ordinary funeral service, something that those who died at sea had never benefitted from. A great many local inhabitants, both old and young, men and women, have been present at these ceremonies as has been reported in regional newspapers. About two hundred people attended the ceremony at Lyse near Lysekil in 2002 (*Bohusläningen*, 30 July 2002). The memorial consequently becomes a communal concern of interest to the entire local populace. Many local people have relatives among these long-dead victims.

The memorial stones have given the local history a new dimension in present times. Memories that were formerly found only in oral narrative tradition, have now

3. The consecration ceremony in Bohus-Malmön in 1993 carried out by a clergyman with the participation of many local inhabitants. Photo from Bohusläningen 1993, Uddevalla.

received a tangible, physical shape. Such tradition is in grave danger of becoming diluted and eventually disappearing. In this situation, history has been revitalized by means of the newly erected memorial stones, the sturdy quality of which bodes well for the future. If and when a new death occurs at sea, the victim's name will be inscribed on the stone and thus find its place in a historical relationship with the local society.

As a comparison with the coastal areas and fisheries of northern Norway, one might mention the book written by the historian Narve Fulsås (2003) from Tromsø about the sea, death at sea and weather conditions in the period 1850–1950. In this book he has carefully documented the making of a memorial stone erected in 1950 in memory of fishermen who drowned in the Lofoten fisheries. This is actually older than the oldest stone in Bohuslän, namely the one from 1952 on Gullholmen. The inscription on the stone in Lofoten reads, "In memory of fishermen lost on the Lofoten Sea". No names or years are mentioned, and in this way the stone becomes a common memorial in contrast to those along the coast of Bohuslän. The anonymity of the dead men is accentuated in that it is only by means of personal names and dates that the individual makes its presence felt. In Bohuslän, there are very few instances where

names and dates are not listed on memorial stones. Since Fulsås concluded his study in 1950, no stone raised after this year has received mention in his book.

In addition to the memorial stones, a new and recent trend in the West-Swedish area under investigation has been the holding of a memorial service in the parish church if the body or bodies of victims have not been recovered from a shipwreck at sea. One such service took place in Morlanda Church in 2000 in memory of a lone fisherman. The traditional funeral rites must be adjusted to account for the absence of a coffin in the church. The next of kin and the circle of friends and acquaintances are thus given an opportunity for a farewell ceremony that was unknown previously. Their grief and bereavement can have a more explicit and collective expression. After a ceremony of this kind the name of the deceased is inscribed on the memorial stone in token of future remembrance. Local newspapers report on such events and these may arouse widespread local interest. The newspaper *Göteborgs-Posten* used the headline "The entire countryside mourns the crew" when reporting on a memorial service in Kville Church. This took place after the sudden disappearance of the fishing boat Novi with her crew of four during lobster fishing in September of 1995. Nearly all 1 800 seats in the church were filled, indicating broad local involvement in this farewell to the dead. This particular ceremony included memorial speeches, the lighting of candles and recitation of poetry, that is to say, both personal actions and words (*Göteborgs-Posten,* 2 January 1996).

2 Death due to traffic accidents

The sea is not the only reaper of accident victims. These tragedies also occur on highways because of the marked growth in automotive traffic in the 1900s. The difference between accidents at sea and those in traffic is that the scene of an accident on a highway can be determined. The ethnologist Konrad Köstlin has studied the increasing number of roadside memorials – crosses placed along German highways – at the scenes of fatal accidents during the 1990s (Köstlin 1999). The site then has a kind of sacred meaning for passers-by because a fatal accident has taken place there, and it also serves as a reminder to drive safely. The crosses then will have a preventive function. General religious and secular meanings can thus go hand-in-hand in contemporary society. Roadside memorials of this kind have also begun to be found in Norway and Sweden in later years. A cross decorated with flowers can be placed at a spot alongside the road where an accident has occurred. However, a wooden cross that I photographed after an accident in Hälleviksstrand in Orust Municipality, Bohuslän in January 1998, disappeared after a period of about three months. Another cross in Stala, in Orust, that was set up after an accident at a sharp bend in the road in Octo-

4. A wooden cross in Stala that was put up after an accident at a sharp bend in the road in 1997. Photo by Anders Gustavsson 2004.

ber 1997 stood there and was regularly decorated with plastic flowers during ten years (fig. 4). This cross was very conspicuous and easily observable. The memory of a fatal accident and a warning of the dangers in traffic were indeed combined in this example. The cross therefore will retain its significance for wayfarers in years to come, not just in the months immediately following the accident.

The fact that a memorial marking can remain to be cared for over a long period of time may be of actual benefit to the next of kin. This was confirmed by a married couple in a newspaper interview in 2003. They had lost their son in 1995 when he was run down by an inebriated driver. The parents have cared for a bed of plants encircled by stones at the scene of the accident. The father stated "visiting the grave is just too sorrowful, so I do not do that more often than twice a year. This memorial does not arouse the same feelings and I also feel I am doing something meaningful about drunk driving" (*Kyrkans Tidning,* 30 October to 5 November 2003).

The accident site is here experienced both as being less personal than the grave and as giving society at large, not only a private circle, an opportunity for action, in this case, warning against drunk driving. This effort is made to save others from suffering the same kind of tragedy as oneself.

A memorial made of stone cannot be placed as close to the road itself and is, accordingly, not as visible as a wooden cross, but it is, on the other hand, far more durable than a cross of wood. After comedian Lasse Lindroth was killed in 1999 in an accident at a very sharp curve in Bohuslän when driving home from Oslo to Gothenburg, his relatives placed a memorial stone on the site. The inscription on the stone reads, "Lasse Lindroth died here on 11 July 1999". Use of the personal name ensures that the victim will remain an individual for all time in contrast to the anonymous wooden crosses. Many friends and acquaintances have participated in the consecration ceremonies of such memorial stones, especially when the victim lived near the accident site. The ceremony thus becomes a local manifestation of memory and solidarity.

The National Association for the Victims of Traffic Accidents, Hordaland in Norway planned to place signs marked with crosses at sites of fatal accidents along highways throughout Norway. These white crosses against a black background were meant to symbolize death. According to the association, they would warn about the continuously rising number of fatal traffic accidents and thus help to save lives. The cross as a symbol of death would, in this case, act as a deterrent. The Norwegian transport authorities did not, however, give permission for the plan. Instead, they saw the crosses as a danger for traffic safety because of their distracting drivers' attention (*Aftenposten,* 12 August 2000). Individuals and associations cannot act freely as far as public places are concerned. There are official, legal limits as to what can be realized as a collective memorial action.

An illegal action was carried out in Norway in the autumn of 2003 when 58 wooden crosses were set up along highway E6 in Østfold as a reminder of the 58 persons who had been killed on this highway since 1990. After an hour, the activists were forced by the police to remove the crosses (*Halden Arbeiderblad,* 25 November 2003). The 58 victims were not regarded as individuals, but were remembered as a collective unit. The reason for setting up the crosses was once again to warn of the danger of new accidents. The activists also hoped that their demonstration would help to hasten the building of a new four-lane highway. Thus, a criticism of the Norwegian transport authorities, and of the state, was involved in the action.

In recent years, a new form of remembrance has rapidly gained popularity in Sweden – crosses have been replaced at accident sites by brighter symbols, such as flowers, lighted candles, poems and photos of the victim or victims. Such items do not have anything approaching the durability of wooden crosses or stones. The new symbols have a more spontaneous character as an expression of the sudden grief and bereavement brought on by an accident. Such brighter symbols, however, will help to lighten the bleakness of the shock that has been experienced. The cross is more linked with death and sorrow in modern Swedish society, and to the darker side of existence in general. Brighter symbols may fill a need for support in the severe situation of grief. Wilted flowers and extinguished candles have in several cases been replaced. This, however, demands repeated actions from the next of kin and friends of the victims. A similar change, replacement of the cross with flowers and candles, has been recorded in obituaries and gravestones in recent years (Dahlgren 2000, Gustavsson 2003).

Friends of the victim(s) have also started to assemble in person at the scene of an accident shortly after it has taken place in order to give silent and collective testimony of their grief and bereavement. This is especially true when the accidents involve young people. The disaster will be experienced as being particularly tangible on the precise site of the accident. Several instances of this new custom have been re-

5. A 17-year-old boy from Västra Frölunda in Gothenburg lost his life after crashing his car in this mountainside in September 2000. The next evening his young friends gathered at the site and placed there several photographs of the victim, flowers and numerous lighted candles and torches. Photo by Anders Gustavsson.

ported in articles and photographs in both Norwegian and Swedish newspapers. In 2003, a newspaper reporter from Oslo told of having been sent out to photograph several such incidents during the last years. I had the opportunity to conduct a documentation of a memorial event in Morlanda on the island of Orust in September 2000. A seventeen-year-old boy from Västra Frölunda, a suburb of Gothenburg, crashed his car one night on a rocky cliff and was killed instantly. The next evening a large group of dark-clad young people assembled at the scene of the accident about 80 kilometres from Gothenburg. There, the young people lit candles and set out flowers and several enlarged photographs of the victim (fig. 5). The photos especially strengthened the impression that the victim could be felt as being present. The young people remained at the site in heartfelt silence for a long time. I observed all of this at a tactful distance and later photographed the richly adorned site. However, within a few weeks this memorial had disappeared; the flowers had withered and the candles burned out. The idea of using the site as a symbol of warning had not been the objective here, as it had been in previous instances of wooden crosses being placed alongside highways. After the funeral, the next of kin and the young friends could visit

the grave whenever they wished to commemorate the victim, and had no need to drive to an accident site a long distance away.

Traffic authorities in Sweden have reacted with unease to the new custom of the gathering of large groups of people at accident sites. A representative for the Highway Department in western Sweden stated in 1999 "when these people gather together after an incident like this, they just don't consider their own safety. We have had several close calls recently and fear that this may lead to a serious accident" (*Göteborgs-Posten,* 17 January 1999).

The same traffic accident may often involve the deaths of several young people. I have found quite a number of newspaper reports from Norway showing how an entire community is stricken when the young victims come from the same area. This leads to acute despair involving the entire community just as was the case when several fishermen from the same village were lost (see above). After a traffic accident in February 2000 in Norway in which three young people were killed, a man who lives in the stricken community of some 500 people said, "in a tiny village like ours, we all feel like the next of kin*"* (*VG,* 8 February 2000) (fig. 6). The scenes of such traffic accidents and the young people's homes are often located close to each other, since the victims have been on their way to or from some social gathering nearby. Grief can be expressed by coming together both at the scene of the accident and in available village meeting places such as the church, the community centre or a clubhouse. Gatherings of this kind are held immediately after the accident and may entail talks and the lighting of candles and, occasionally, a display of photographs of the victims. Crowds of people have shown their sympathy at such times of grief by coming together both outdoors and indoors. The solidarity of the local community is very strong in such critical situations and is experienced as being communal. Over 500 young people took part in a memorial service in Randaberg Church in 2000 after three local young people had been killed due to crashing into a tunnel wall. Photographs of the victims and lighted candles were placed at the entrance of the church (*Aftenposten,* 26 March 2000). "It helped us all when we saw that almost the entire community was present", said the local sheriff when nearly 300 people gathered in Eggedal's community centre in Buskerud county after two young men were killed in 2002 when their car crashed into a building (*Dagbladet,* 12 August 2002). In addition, a huge crowd of people cannot gather together on a highway of heavy traffic after a fatal accident, but must find some other and larger venue for holding the memorial ceremony.

Young people have started to adopt a completely new way of expressing their grief and sense of loss when close friends have lost their lives – they publish written messages on the Internet. This method serves to supplement the visits to the place of accident. When a fifteen-year-old girl from Bærum near Oslo was killed while riding

6. About 150 young people assembled at the scene of a traffic accident in 2003 near Oslo on the day after three local youngsters died after colliding with a bus. Photo by Jon Terje H. Hansen, Dagbladet, Oslo.

her bicycle in October of 2004, her close friends immediately established a website entitled Guestbook at www.johannerip.com. The site features not only all the different messages written by friends and relatives, but also messages from many people from outside the closest circle of friends. "This is our way of showing our grief. We think it's just fine that anyone can find out what we feel. We are also happy that people we don't know show that they care about this", said a couple of close girlfriends who were responsible for the website. One recurring theme was that the deceased was an angel, for example, "Johanne was an angel who was sent to Earth to teach others how to laugh and smile. But God needed her in Heaven" or "You will always be an angel in my eyes! Rest in peace, we'll meet again!" This form of belief in angels can be associated with neo-religious trends (see below). The parents of the deceased have also derived comfort from acquainting themselves with the messages posted on the website. "I feel that taking part in the website helps me keep going", as the father of a deceased has put it (*Aftenposten,* 10 November 2001). "It makes my grief less lonely" (*VG* 2004). Another website was set up by a young man from Bergen whose best friend was killed in a traffic accident. According to him, the purpose of this site is "to help others who mourn the loss of a young person they loved" (www.viminner.no).

Through the medium of Internet, young people can sit in their own rooms and write down their innermost thoughts without having to move physically to a particular place. This encourages individual expression of mourning, while the collective and official aspect is invoked when both the close circle of friends and the general public are able to read the messages that have been published at the website. The young people are able to express them repeatedly as if they were carrying on a dialogue with the deceased friend. All of this indicates our witnessing a form of ritual behaviour. Intense emotions can be more easily expressed by young people in written form when sitting alone in front of their PCs rather than orally when confronted by a gathering of friends and acquaintances at the location of a physical memorial. The use of the Internet and gathering together at such memorial places do not exclude one another, though, but serve different functions for the mourners.

3 Murder or manslaughter in public areas

The murder of Sweden's Prime Minister, Olof Palme, on a city street in Stockholm in 1986 was an immense shock for the Swedish people. This was expressed in numerous ritual demonstrations. Enormous quantities of flowers, candles and handwritten tributes were laid at the murder site. These activities have been described by the German ethnologist Martin Scharfe who was a guest professor in Stockholm at the time. His explanation of the causes of such vast collective actions was that they were especially indicative of a crisis in the national consciousness. The general public experienced the murder of Prime Minister as a threat to the nation (Scharfe 1989).

Several newspapers in both Norway and Sweden have reported in recent years about similar expressions of grief and remembrance at murder sites. If the murder has taken place indoors, such observances are carried out outside the building so that more people can participate in the actions expressing sorrow and disgust. When a man was found murdered in his apartment in Forsbacka in Gästrikland in December of 2003, the newspaper *Aftonbladet* reported shortly afterwards that "his friends have made a huge memorial outside the apartment block, consisting of candles, flowers and personal greetings" (*Aftonbladet,* 8 December 2003). They also expressed uneasiness and fear because of the possible presence of an unknown murderer in their neighbourhood. "You don't feel safe outdoors any more", as one of the man's friends said. The above cases concerned a completely ordinary person who was the victim of a murder.

The murder of Sweden's foreign minister Anna Lindh on 10 September 2003 received special attention in the media. A large photograph of Lindh, surrounded by flowers and lit candles, was placed outside the department store in Stockholm where

she was stabbed. The murder of Sabina, a little five-year old girl from Arvika, Värmland, who was stabbed by a psychiatric patient the day after Anna Lindh's murder, also received vast attention in Sweden's national newspapers. "Scores of children have placed toys, flowers and drawings for Sabina at the scene of her murder", reported *Göteborgs Tidningen* and published several photographs of the objects (*Göteborgs Tidningen,* 21 September 2003). A large photograph of Sabina was hung on the fence surrounding her day-care centre. In many of the greetings by children and adults, angels were mentioned. "The angels are guarding you, Sabina", wrote Rebecca and Anki. As was expressed by one mourner, Sabina was seen as having moved on to a life among angels: "Little Sabina, play with other angel children". This indicates a need and desire to emphasize continuation beyond the limits of earthly life when a child dies. The brutal and sudden obliteration of a fragile, budding life will otherwise make the parting even more tragic and definite. A belief in an affirmative continuation of existence after death can obviously help in the traumatic grief process. The dead child has not only come to the angels, but is also considered to have become an angel child. This is consistent with a neoreligious conception of existence (Dahlgren 2000), and has also been reinforced by neo-religious movements (Alver 1999).

7. Many young friends assembled at the site of murder when a young man, 23 years old, was killed outside his home in Oslo in 2002. Photo by Truls Brekke, Dagbladet, Oslo.

Such ways of thinking can also be encountered on the memorial websites that have been established when children or young people have been victims of murder. "I hope you're happy in Heaven and that you're keeping an eye on us from up there – lots of love from Micke", was one of the messages published on the website *Lunarstorm* after the murder of a twenty-year-old girl in Sala, Sweden, in 2005 (*Göteborgs Tidningen,* 31 January 2005). Another friend wrote, "See you in Heaven". The conceptions in messages of this kind often have to do with a belief in the victim's residing in Heaven and watching over the life on Earth. The mourners and the victim are expected to meet again in some unforeseeable future. This indicates the obvious influence of neoreligious trends which specifically stress the importance of both individuals and a bright and harmonious view of paradise (Alver 1996).

Ritual expression is felt to be necessary not only at the scene of a murder but also in the public sphere where many people can gather together, as has been shown in connection with deaths due to traffic accidents (see above). In the public space, people can experience solidarity and give collective expression to their grief and protest against the traumatic situation that has arisen. On the evening after Sabina's murder in Arvika, more than 2 000 people came together in the town square to take part in a memorial ceremony for both Sweden's foreign minister and for little Sabina. Here no distinction was made as to social class or age. Death obliterates all social stratification. The message expressed by the ceremony was for a complete repudiation of all crimes of violence. In situations involving sudden crisis and shock, whether on the national or local level, public expressions of solidarity and repudiation are of vital importance. In these cases, crimes of violence are considered to be symptoms of negative social phenomena as symbolized by video violence, reduction of psychiatric services, etc. A resolve to combat such evils and work for the common good must be developed for the future.

Both Norwegian and Swedish newspapers have published many articles concerning such ritual expressions in recent years. The essential elements are flowers, lit candles, handwritten texts, a silent group of people at the murder site and sometimes a photograph of the victim. At larger gatherings in some public place, sacred or secular speeches with concluding appeals are also common, expressing a need not only for an appeasement of remembrance and grief, but also for changes with regard to the future (fig. 7). Anxiety over a resurge of violence can often be expressed at such gatherings if the murderer has not yet been arrested. A demonstration of this kind took place in Oslo in January 2002. The torchlight procession that followed was held under a banner proclaiming "This must not be repeated" (*Dagbladet,* 26 March 2002).

A new form of ritual expression encountered in recent years is that gatherings take place not only immediately after a murder, an accident or other sudden death, but also on the anniversaries of such events. This is especially true of the gathering of

friends of the victim(s) on the tragedy's first anniversary. These first anniversaries have attained a special symbolical meaning. For the next of kin, such manifestations by their friends and acquaintances have come to provide very real assistance in the prolonged process of grief. These friends show that they have not forgotten the shocking event, but want to express their feelings once again in a repeated public action. "It feels as if the meeting can support us throughout this day of death", the mother of a strangled girl said on the anniversary of her murder in Gothenburg on 19 January 2003. Her friends held a memorial meeting on 19 January 2004 at the same place they had assembled a year before (*Göteborgs Tidningen,* 19 January 2004). In other cases, friends of the murder victim have gathered together and placed lit candles, flowers, pictures of angels, red hearts and handwritten notes on the grave.

A more recent way of commemorating the scene of a murder is to put up a memorial stone. This was done after the murder of two policemen on 28 May 1999 in the village of Malexander in Östergötland. The mother of one of the policemen took the initiative for erecting the stone. It was consecrated in October 1999 in the presence of some fifty relatives and friends. During this consecration ceremony, the mother looked towards the future and said, "I hope that this memorial will awaken memories, that many people will see it and will remember what happened" (*Göteborgs-Posten*, 24 October 1999). The memorial stone points both back in time to the event and ahead as a protest against future violence. Passers-by have continued to place flowers at the stone.

Concluding remarks

This chapter has focused on the types of action and behavioural patterns that emerge among the next of kin and friends when confronted by unexpected death. In such deeply tragic circumstances ritual demonstrations can be of great value by enabling the emotional survival of the victim's next of kin. Activities that the mourners participate in together on recurring occasions can help to alleviate states of shock. The focus of this chapter has been on the emergence of numerous innovations having to do with coping with sudden grief in recent years. Special patterns of behaviour have then become evident, such as the use of the Internet to demonstrate grief and remembrance. Examples of innovation and change of this kind have been emphasized in the study. The public marking of sudden death by means of collective actions has become far more prominent in recent years in comparison to past times. This can be seen at sites where a traffic accident, a murder or manslaughter has occurred, and in connection with memorials to fishermen who have lost their lives at sea.

Commemoration of deaths in traffic accidents and due to murder or manslaugh-

ter seems to have assumed similar features in Norway and Sweden in recent years. A behavioural pattern having mostly to do with young people who have perished or been killed has obviously been the subject of fairly rapid cultivation. Compared to previous years, a change is very marked. Young people have seized the initiative in these new rituals concerning traffic accidents, murder or manslaughter but not in connection with memorials to the deceased fishermen. In the latter case, it is the adults who also look after local oral tradition and have taken the initiative.

Fatal accidents involving the young or the middle-aged in recent years are being commemorated in an entirely different manner than those striking the elderly. The tragedy is experienced as being extra tragic when children and young people are the victims. A generational gap is obvious in such incidents. Memorial commemorations are conducted by those belonging to the same age group as the deceased. The youth thus become the centre of attention in that they are the most active and inventive. They express their feelings of grief, loss and solidarity through their actions and by using the Internet. They utilize visual symbolic expressions such as placing flowers, writing letters or lighting candles. The young find performing these activities in the company of others appropriate. This way much of the anguish connected with sudden death is alleviated and replaced with something of a brighter aspect. This is especially obvious when the young victims are described as being angels in heaven in Internet messages, in keeping with neoreligious views. At the same time the participants demonstrate their solidarity with those who have been hit the hardest – the closest family and relatives.

There is no doubt that newspapers, especially tabloids in Sweden, have been instrumental in the spread of these new rituals commemorating young victims of unexpected death, with their articles and photographs from the scenes of traffic accidents or murders. This is done in a far more obtrusive manner than ever before. Newspaper readers receive impulses which may be acted upon when new accidents are experienced in the future. Newspaper journalists have themselves witnessed the growth of new rituals for which young people have taken the initiative. Such collective actions are then repeated on later occasions, becoming definite behavioural patterns which are adjusted to suit new situations. Newspapers seek to publish such episodes even if journalists are met with reactions of ethical nature from the young people, such as “Can’t you understand that we’re holding a memorial?” (*Dagbladet,* 25 July 2005). The journalists, however, are not deterred, but take pictures of anything even if the scenes are emotionally charged. As a journalist wrote in *Dagbladet* on 25 July 2005, “the photographers just wait until groups of the bereaved gather together so they can get a shot of ` collective sorrow´”. Nothing of this kind has been experienced in former times. The boundaries of journalistic ethics have evidently been extended in an unmistakable way. A grief-stricken observance for a closed circle of

family and friends becomes exposed to the general public in far-distant localities because of the intrusive activities of the press. The newspapers do not construct new rituals, but their intimate reports on them contribute to their spread.

Death in our time has obviously become less secretive and private than was the case in the early 1900s. This is even more obvious in situations of dramatic crisis. The newspapers' clearly increasing interest in life's tragic occurrences has led to a noticeable change in attitude which indicates that such tragedy no longer must be kept secret. It can instead be commemorated more openly in public and in company of one's social group. This is a source for the establishment of new rituals on similar occasions. Feelings of grief and shock affecting young people are expressed more openly in a manner that had never occurred before the 1990s. It is important that the family and friends are able to find ways in which to endure the unexpected and appalling. Great benefits can be derived from these manifestations of interdependence and collectivity which can be repeated later in analogous situations. This aids the family and friends by showing that they are not left alone in their shock and grief, but have a clearly expressed network of social support instead. The private sphere has become increasingly public with newspapers becoming important actors. This is a precondition for the formation and later continuation of collective and public patterns of behaviour. Such actions must be observable in a social setting. Solidarity and collectivism have become important key words in the approach to traumatic situations at the expense of individuality and privacy. This is a major innovation in the study of rituals around sudden death in recent times.

The above-said could teach us that ritual expression is subject to continuous revision. Culture is not static but acquires new forms of expression and adapts itself to new situations in keeping with the spirit of the times. Tradition and renewal thus go hand in hand and supplement each other.

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Internet

www.johannerip.com
www.viminner.no

8
Conceptions of faith as expressed on memorial Internet websites in Norway and Sweden. An existence after death?

Written messages on the Internet relating to persons who have died in recent years comprise a new medium for expressing conceptions of faith. This new medium affords undreamt of and hitherto quite unexploited opportunities for conducting cultural research by allowing access to the emotions, beliefs and experiences of present-day people. Such memorial websites, which began appearing in the 2000s, have increased very noticeably in the past few years. Messages about one and the same deceased person can continue over several years in connection with, for example, birthdays, name days and anniversaries of the death. Both relatives and friends can express themselves about and to the deceased person. Mourners can sit alone at their PCs and not only express emotions, but also conduct an imaginary conversation with the deceased. Because the message and the imaginary conversations are published on the Internet, they are also accessible to outsiders, both acquaintances and strangers, including scholars. My research deals with memorial websites that have become available during 2009 and 2010 in Norway and Sweden, with the most extensive material being found in Sweden. Conducting the study on a regional basis in these countries has not been possible, because the deceased's and the writers' residences are seldom noted. Nor has it been possible to gain any impression of the writers' social status.

Research on material obtained from the Internet is beginning to attract attention at a basic level in the cultural sciences. This is seen by, inter alia, the articles in the annual *Ethnologia Scandinavica* for 2009 being devoted to critical questions about the Internet as a research source. Similar topics were also the theme of a special feature issue of *Nätverket* for 2010, an electronic journal of ethnology published in Uppsala. Also of interest is the anthology *Digital Storytelling* edited by the Norwegian sociologist Knut Lundby and published in 2008. The term "Netnography" is beginning to occur. Robert V. Kozinets leaves the following definition: "Netnography is participant-observational research based on online fieldwork. It uses computer-mediated communications as a source of data to arrive at the ethnographic understanding and representation of a cultural or communal phenomenon" (Kozinets 2010:60).

In this chapter I will discuss views about the deceased as these are expressed in mourners' messages on memorial Internet websites. The all-inclusive issue in the present study concerns how mourners express their emotions, experiences and concepts of belief regarding the deceased person. This can be done verbally, by publishing written descriptions and poems, or illustratively, by using pictures such as photographs or pictorial symbols. Do concepts of a life after death exist and how are these expressed? What is the deceased's status considered to be on the other side and is she or he accessible in any way for the mourners? Can the dead be aware of and perceive the messages that the living send to them? Is any form of dialogue possible with them? Can the living at some future time after their own deaths be reunited with their dead loved ones and friends?

In this one must also be aware of the different existing conceptions about angels, indeed even about the deceased themselves being considered by the bereaved to have become angels. The question focused upon in this chapter is the belief in something posthumously supernatural, and not primarily the rational expression of grief such as remembrance, loss and love. Dreams can be regarded as a non-rational form of contact with deceased persons who have been on intimate terms with the survivors. Another important point is to observe the form of language employed by the survivors when they speak of supernatural matters. How do they use the verbs *believe* and *know*, respectively?

This study can in addition play a part in the contemporary discussion about greater outspokenness concerning death, compared to the prevalent silence and tabooing of the 1900s. The Danish sociologist Michael Hviid Jacobsen maintains that openness about death again became acceptable after the death of the French historian of mentalities Philippe Ariés in 1984. Jacobsen calls this the fifth historical phase to complement Ariés' four historical phases, and has given this fifth phase the alternative names of "The spectacular death" or "The paradoxical death". The trend of expressing oneself publicly has become evident in recent years both in the media and in social research (Jacobsen 2009). The present study concentrates on what is expressed by individuals on their own PCs in the privacy of their homes. What is written does not remain confidential, however, but can actually reach the public at large, i.e. become accessible on a communal level. The general trend remarked upon by Jacobsen can have aided people in extreme and, in many cases, suddenly experienced grief to risk public openness about their deeply felt distress, without needing to confront other people in person. This form of openness may even prove therapeutic for the writers.

Examples of memorial websites

In 2008 there were about 600 memorial websites in Sweden (*Dagens Nyheter*, 6 October 2008). These memorial websites were set up by people who had recently suf-

fered extreme grief in their immediate relationships. They wished to create virtual meeting places. New contacts and networks can thus arise between people who find themselves in similar circumstances. The following are some of the homepages for mourners which I have studied: www.bloggtoppen.se/tema/sorg/ (theme/sorrow),www.efterlevande.se/aktuell.html (the national league of widow and widowers), www.evigaminnen.se/minnessida/ (eternal memory), www.hem.passagen.se/anglaforum (the angel forum), www.hem.passagen.se/anglaringen/ (the angel ring), www.kanalen.org/barn-i-minne/sidor.html (children in memorium), www.livetefterdoden.bloggagratis.se (life after death), www.metrobloggen.se (the metro blogg), www.minnesljus.se (memorial light), www.minneslunden.se (memorial grove), www.minnessidan.se (memorial site), www.mista.se (loss – begun in 2007), www.samsorg.se (SAMS cooperation for people in sorrow), www.smaanglar.org/ (little angels – organized by the parent association Little Angels), www.sorginfo.se (grief information – begun in 2005), www.tillminneav.se/showpage.phd?id (in memorium – begun in 2006 and visited by more than one million people by 2010), www.vimil.se (we who have lost a loved one in the midst of life - begun in 2005), www.vsfb.se/main/page (a non-profit parents' association for those who have lost a child).

I have not discovered as many memorial sites in Norway as in Sweden. Amongst the Norwegian memorial sites that I have studied are: www.englesiden.com (the angels' site), www.etbarnforlite.no/Menysider/nyheter.htm (a child too few, set up by the association We who have a child too few), www.forum.smartmamma.com/showthread.php (smart mama), www.hvilifred.no/index.php?id (rest in peace), www.minnelunden.no (the memorial grove).

Although I have read messages posted on a great number of memorial sites, this study is by no means quantitative. Emphasis is placed on an analysis of the contents of the messages which stress a perspective of faith. In this way I avoid being all-embracing, as would be impossible for a scholar working on his own.

Women writers

My material shows clearly that those who post messages on memorial websites are for the most part women, often mothers or widows and sometimes sisters. Persons who express themselves on guest books are primarily those who have newly experienced the tragic loss of a loved one. The expression "trasig mamma" ("broken mum") appears frequently when mothers write about their lost children. The mother of Martin who died in a traffic accident in 2007 has a memorial site on the joint website www.tillminneav.se (in memory of). She reports that mothers meet there in order to

share grief and loss and to support one another. She adds: "I don't know what fathers do. They probably mourn in some other way" (*Dagens Nyheter*, 6 October 2008). Guest book messages can say: "Love from one more broken mum".

Openness in speaking about death in "the fifth phase", to use Michael Hviid Jacobsen's term (see above), scarcely seems to be a general pattern but is instead gender-determined on the Internet. What can this come of? It may be that men have more difficulty in expressing their deep emotions in words at times of crisis, and instead move away and take shelter behind their wives or partners, if they are alive and still living with the man. With regard to children who have died the messages are often signed "Mummy and Daddy". The choice of words indicates, however, that a woman has written the texts. Similarly messages are often written by sisters in many cases but seldom by brothers. Sisters have also started memorial websites. Emotions are far more clearly shown by sisters than by any brothers. This corresponds to the ethnologist Britta Lundgren's experiences. When she enquired through the press for informants who were willing to talk about reactions of grief in connection with unexpected and fairly recent deaths in the immediate family, only women responded. Lundgren was therefore obliged to conduct her interview work solely among women (Lundgren 2006).

A new trend may be emerging with regard to men. An article in the *Ystads Allehanda* on 28 February 2009 reported on a 32-year-old man from Kristianstad. He lost his wife and a daughter in a motor accident in April of 2008. A short time later he started the blog www.singelpappa.blogg.se (single father blog). He believes that men also need an opportunity to express their emotions. He expresses criticism of mass media's one-sidedness in this regard: "When it comes to a major tragedy the media always stress the role of mothers and women. Men are very seldom given a chance to talk about their feelings". He also reports that even just after the accident at the hospital, he had been open, speaking again and again about what had happened. Time will show if men will begin to express themselves more often on the Internet when confronted with crisis situations than has been the case thus far. The question is whether women, thanks to their openness, could show them how. In Norway I have actually found proportionately more men than in Sweden who express themselves directly and positively about the importance of posting entries on memorial websites. When a fifteen-year-old girl lost her life near Oslo in October of 2004, her father told *Aftenposten* on 10 November 2004: "I feel that participation on the website helps me to go on".

The function of memorial websites for those who write and read messages

Memorial websites are set up by close relatives for their own family members, especially for children and young people, and even for stillborn babies. Numerous rela-

tives have expressed how much relief they felt on discovering a memorial website after they had been stricken by extreme grief. The signature Dollface wrote in 2008: "This website came like a rescuing angel". This was two months after she had lost her boyfriend. The messages on these websites become a virtual, social meeting place by giving mourners an opportunity to express themselves and avoid remaining alone with their grief. Close relatives in a state of mourning are thus clearly gratified when other people post messages and when they light symbolic candles without words in memory of the deceased. Communication in word and deed overcomes isolation. A number of newspaper stories are based on interviews about the value of memorial websites and blogs for the closest grieving relatives in their prolonged process of mourning. This is an obvious example of the media's increasing frankness about reporting on the very real and intimate aspects of death that strike individuals. *Aftonbladet* for 7 December 2006 had an article entitled "The dead live again on the Internet". Here the mother of the twenty-two-year-old Jonny said: "I am able to share my sorrow and that helps". Lotta aged 36 lost her 43-year-old husband due to an asthma attack in 2008. One year later she told the newspaper *Göteborgs-Posten* that "it is easier to write than to talk. My blog forces me to bring order in my inner chaos and sort out my thoughts so that others can read and understand them. ... I have got many friends through my blog. ... Because of my blog I have received a lot of support that I otherwise never would have got" (*Göteborgs-Posten*, 1 November 2009). Those who write on the memorial website www.mista.se (loss, started in 2007), predominantly widows, call each other "friends in loss" who comfort one another. They help each other carry on with their lives despite their grief. As Marianne writes about this website: "This is where I have found my real friends, those I can share sorrow, joy, everyday things with". A new social fellowship arises which is neither restricted in terms of space nor related to previous contacts in one's life. Malin, whose husband died suddenly in 2008, leaving her alone with her two children, writes to another recent widow: "Take comfort in the fact that life actually will keep going on, and that the happy moments will return". Accounts such as these are comprehended by the mourners and have given them psychological aid in crisis situations. Helena, who had lost her husband one month earlier, writes in reply to a message from Tina: "I just soak up things like after 14 months there will be more good moments than bad ones". The importance of the guest books for the next of kin is clearly shown in messages of gratitude that are posted. After 18-year-old Josefine's death, her mother writes: "Thanks to all you sweet people for your caring words, I am so glad when you write comments, they warm my heart".

Memorial websites help keep the memory of the deceased alive and not rapidly forgotten. After her son Martin had been killed in an auto accident in 2007, his mother said to the newspaper *Dagens Nyheter* on 6 October 2008: "I will do everything in

my power to make sure that Martin's memory lives on. I want everyone to know what a fantastic person he was". Being able to write directly to the deceased is also important for mourners. Lillemor lost her boyfriend Uffe in 2009 and relates: "One way to manage grief is the blog. ... I write to Uffe there and hope that he can read it somewhere" (*Göteborgs Tidningen*, 31 October 2009). Several mothers have begun to write poems after the death of their children. These are published on memorial websites.

Even in Norway newspaper articles on the growth of memorial sites on the Internet began to appear in the 2000s. The newspaper *VG* had an article on 2 December 2004 entitled "Young people mourn on the Internet". Three friends of 15-year-old Aleksander, who died in an accident in 2003, started the website www.viminner.no (we remember). Aleksander's father stated that "the memorial website has meant a lot to us, almost unbelievably so, in our process of grieving. We see that not only have we lost a son and brother, but that a lot of other people also have lost a friend. This shows we are not alone with our sorrow."

What perceptions of the deceased persons do we encounter on these memorial websites? This will be the most important objective to be studied in the following.

The deceased's existence in heaven

The concept that the deceased is somewhere in heaven is very common. There she or he can meet with others who have died and live together with them. Using messages in guest books, other mourners can express hopes that their various relatives will be able to meet one another even if they were not acquainted during their earthly lives. A new fellowship is assumed to have occurred after death. On the memorial website for the child Edwin, Katia from Malmö writes in 2001, after she lost her own child Pyret: "She is surely playing with your little son now up there among the clouds! There's a whole group of little friends up there!" Existence in heaven is thus considered to be very similar to that on earth. At midsummer in 2008, the mother who had lost her son Erik two years earlier wrote in the guest book set up for 16-year-old Emanuel, who died of cancer in 2006: "I hope our boys are enjoying themselves now in their angel home what with swimming and everything else they can do in summer". The life that is conceived of in the conceptual world is a very concrete and pleasant one. We never meet negative concepts of the existence in heaven. This reminds one of neo-religious ideas of "the recaptured paradise" which the folklorist Bente Gullveig Alver has analysed (Alver 1999b).

Deceased persons are believed to be able to continue practising their activities in heaven. This can relate to motocross such as Marcus loved until his death in 2008 at

23 years of age. A message about him said: "We hope you're happy there among the angels and that you do a lot of motocross racing". A photograph of the young man on his bike is included.

The concept of heaven can in some instances be replaced by the phrase *Nangijala,* even if this is not very common. This is the name of the kingdom of death in Astrid Lindgren's novel *Bröderna Lejonhjärta* (The Brothers Lionheart, www.ne.se Nangijala). Conceptions of Nangijala do not, however, exclude belief in the deceased's encounters with angels. The mother of Benjamin, a victim of sudden infant death syndrome in 2004, hopes for a future meeting in Nangijala, adding: "I'll bet you get up to just as much mischief with the angels as you did with me".

Doubt or absolute denial of any form of existence after death is extremely rare in the messages studied here. Some messages do not mention belief in any form of existence after death. Doubt and clearly expressed denial are still very unusual. Two years after nine-year-old Albin was killed in a traffic accident, his mother wrote on 2 March 2008: "You know what, I have doubts about that everlasting life. It is the here and now that exist". On 29 March 2008 she adds that "reunions must happen in our dreams. In our imagination. In our memories". She does not expect anything other than what can be proved rationally in the form of dreams. In contrast, her younger son, Albin's seven-year-old brother Nils, wrote of how he envisioned Albin being in heaven. "I'd like to be in heaven and play with him." He even believed he would be reunited with his brother: "When I die, I'm going to take sweets along with me for him". This childish faith differs from the mother's rational point of view. One might ask oneself if seven-year-old Nils wrote this message himself or if his mother or someone else in the family helped him. Differences of opinion within the family are expressed here nonetheless. Even in those cases where relatives disapprove of contact with any form of religion, incidents of death among the very young can lead to a belief that the deceased still lives on in some way. David, who lived in Enköping, died of cancer at 12 years of age. His funeral service was a civil ceremony since he had not been christened and had had no contact with religion. Even so, his sister wrote a message saying "I know that you're watching over me".

One's conception of the world can change when a sudden death occurs in one's own immediate circle. New ideas can arise in a sudden and demanding situation. It seems impossible to believe that everything quite simply has stopped. This is especially true with regard to deaths among children and young people who are expected to have a long life ahead of them. Such spontaneously arising and completely new ideas occur in the messages expressed by the mother of Max and Saga who were murdered in 2008: "I have never been a believer. Never believed in God and been fairly sceptical to concepts of a life after death. But after this ... I still am not a believer. But I want to believe that something happens after death. I want to believe

that Max and Saga are well and happy and that they are with each other. ... I want to believe this, and then I do believe it. I do not believe that any god exists. But I must believe that my angels are really angels and are happy now". This mother can even conceive of seeing her children once again when she writes to Saga on 25 February 2009: "Play with the angels until I come up to you some day and can embrace you both again". Belief in a life after death and in angels can in other words exist even if one has no faith in God. This is not a traditional Christian religion that has become tangible in a postmodern, secular Sweden. Instead, it is a conceptual world that the afflicted persons themselves can create in order to find some form of consolation and an emotional basis for managing to continue to live on. An individualism of this kind which is freed from traditional religiosity is a characteristic of neo-religious trends (Gilhus and Mikaelsson 2005). Memorial websites assist in the spread of such conceptions to others who have suffered similarly.

Contacts and opportunities for contact with the deceased

It is often thought that the deceased can be contacted by the living and that these latter can even communicate their messages to the deceased on a computer. A mother living in the town of Sandviken wrote to her deceased son: "I think of you all the time and wish that I could telephone you and hear your voice. Now I'll send this mail up to heaven instead and hope that it reaches you. If you want anything, my dearest boy, I'll be sitting here at my computer for a while every day". As can be seen in this message, the deceased are also thought to be able to contact the living. It would appear that there is a notion that the deceased also have a computer. The technical possibilities of this life are, in other words, transferable to the existence on the far side of death.

When the deceased are in heaven, they are often believed to participate in events on earth, whether or not they are thought of as angels. They both watch over and protect their friends and relatives. This presupposes that they as dead beings or angels have got an agency (Walter 2011). Camilla wrote to her "pal" Andreas who died in 2008, 23 years of age: "I know that when I look up towards heaven I am certain that you are sitting there and looking down and keeping all your friends out of trouble, because your friends have always been important for you". The word *know* instead of *believe* suggests that Camilla is very convinced about the truth of what she writes. After Joakim died in 2000 aged 27, his mother does not seem equally certain since she writes: "I believe that you watch over me in some way".

The deceased can even be thought to continue to survive on earth if she or he has descendants. This is not a mere matter of belief, but refers to a factual reality. After

Daniel was murdered in 2003 at 19 years of age, his mother wrote: "I am so thankful that you had time to make me a grandmother before your life ended so tragically and that I still have a part of you that I can love and who reminds me so much of you". Nothing is mentioned in this case about a supernatural belief.

Some messages speak of how the deceased appeared in a *dream* in some concrete and intimate manner for a relative. Ylva, who lost her husband Mats in 2008, declares: "It was only after I began to feel a bit better that I finally got to meet him in a fantastic dream where we embraced each other, kissed and trembled with love. He said that he had work to do where he is now, and that I have work to do here, but that SOON we will meet again. Soon we will be reunited. These meetings are not dreams. They are more real to me than when I'm wide awake. They are meetings". This woman does not distinguish between real life and the experiences she has in her dreams. An experience of being actually embraced by the deceased also occurs in some of the other messages about dreams. A Norwegian woman declares that she has met her husband Christoffer in a perceptible manner several times in dreams. She writes: "This is the fifth time I have had this dream. ... I am so thankful for the moments Christoffer and I have had together. How I felt that he was really there. How I felt his weight resting on me. That I really felt that he was there, not gone away as so many say happens when someone dies. He was there and he rested on me. I could feel with my whole body just how calm he was. And that calmed me too. Calmed my grief for a moment, let me see where he was and how he was. I didn't want him to let me go. I wanted his arms around me forever". What is most tragic for these writers was, however, having to wake again after such consoling dreams that had impressed them so deeply.

There are examples of relatives *consulting mediums* in order to make contact with the deceased, and having then become even more convinced that death is not the end. Benny's mother declares: "In our grief we contacted serious mediums like Terry Evans and Gil Petersson and Eva Olsson. Have been at huge séances and private conferences. We have had proof about a life after this one, and that life continues on". There is, to be sure, no great number of messages concerning this. It may be that a memorial website is not where one chooses to mention visits to a medium for making contact with a supernatural world. Such concepts and activities can be more common than is indicated by the number of messages on memorial websites. Concepts about mediums and their abilities to contact a supernatural world are fundamental to the neo-religious movements described as New Age (Gilhus and Mikaelsson 2005:166ff).

The conception of a *reunion* with the deceased sometime in the future often appears in the messages. The coming meeting can be regarded as being very real. A new existence and fellowship can begin that will never end. After Viktor was murdered

in 2007, 40 years of age, his girlfriend wrote: "When we meet again we will get married. Love you, try to take it easy up there, and some fine day we'll be dancing our salsa again". Such belief in being reunited is, however, far more diffuse in a great many other cases. It is not dependent on any particular religious basis. A mother wrote about her son who had died when 25 years old: "My only hope is that I will see him again sometime". The expression of faith can be far more substantial in those other cases which refer to God and angels.

Muslim writers, who are actually not so very numerous in my material, speak of the paradise named in the Koran (www.ne.se Islam, see Døving 2005). The writers are completely convinced about being reunited there. This is indicated by the use of the verb *know* instead of *think*. It is the word of the Koran that has validity. The wife of Samir, who died when 26 years old in 2007, writes: "I know that we will meet again and continue our lives together in paradise, I know that you are waiting for me. ... My life now is just one long transit stage until we meet again".

Explicit conceptions of hell or of punishment after death in the messages are written only about those who have murdered a loved one or some other person close to the writer. Thoughts of revenge after the death are then expressed clearly, if not very often, in the messages. The mother of 19-year-old Daniel who was murdered in 2003 expressed her emotions in the following dramatic manner: "My whole world fell down into the depths of hell and there I creep in pain and longing for you. May the devil plague him who murdered you, my heart's own, and Satan himself carry him off and plague him for all eternity and EVERYONE who kills others, how the hell do they think they have the right to take another's life???????" At the same time this mother adds: "Love all fellowmen/animals/nature because the only thing that lasts IS love".

The deceased's meeting with angels and other divine beings

Belief in angels occurs very often in the messages. In order to enter their world, the deceased must climb an unendingly long stairway that is depicted in some of the messages. This is really a concrete idea. This shows also a difference compared to pet animals that are thought to cross over a so-called rainbow bridge after they die (chapter 10).

The meeting with angels is described in a clearly positive context for the deceased. After Richard died in 2008 at 27 years of age, his cousin Laura wrote the following: "Your last journey to heaven has taken place and a lot of angels carry you there on their wings". The deceased can also speak in poetic form about how happy she or he is among the angels. This can help comfort mourners even when the sense

1 Angels guard the stairs that the dead climb up into heaven. (www.tillminneav.se/showPage.php?id=.344).

of loss continues to be great. When Marcus suddenly died in 2002 at 20 years of age, his mother Mari-Anne Thörnström wrote poems in which her son spoke to her from heaven. One poem written on 16 august 2006 begins in this way:

> Mummy dear, I see you from my new home,
> This home where all the angels dwell.
> I have so many friends, angels who are young and old.
> Here no age matters,
> Only a great love for one another,
> Mummy dear, where angels dwell is just so beautiful,
> ...
> Mummy, I want you to know that I am so happy here.

Because it is so good to be "where angels dwell", Marcus' mother believes that her son "will have a wonderful birthday party up there with the angels. I can see how you smile and laugh on your special day". This was written on Marcus' twenty-fifth birthday in 2007 (www.tillminneavmarcus.dinstudio.se).

A special angel address, www.smaanglar.org, has to do with children. Angels are thought to take particular care of children and this they can themselves express in poems directed towards the next of kin, especially mothers.

When angels are the beings most discussed as having a supernatural or divine character, this is in keeping with neo-religious New Age conceptions (Alver 1999a). God is then more distant. In the memorial website messages that I have studied, however, there are examples of *God* and *Jesus* also being named in addition to angels. This is then seen as being a positive element for the deceased. Anette, who lived in Kållered near Gothenburg and had been ill all her life, died in 2008 at 36 years of age. A message about her reads: "Now she is resting with Jesus in heaven". When four-month- old Nicolai died, his family wrote: "God had other plans for you. He wanted you near him and you left us behind with our despair and loss". An expression that also is used is that the deceased was a gift or a loan from God. In poems in which the deceased speaks to the next of kin, she or he often tells of their life on the far side of death. This is usually an optimistic description of how happy they are in their new existence. The mourners therefore do not need to worry or grieve. Several of these messages mention not only angels but also God and Jesus. This is a different form of belief in angels than the traditional Christian one with origins far back in time. When one-and-a-half year old Nikita died in 2004, this child spoke to his mother in the poem Words of comfort:

I sleep with angels
Who watch over me
Here there is only love
I am never lonely or afraid
For God is so very near
I walk with Jesus every day
He is so kind and gentle
Don't worry Mummy
He holds my hand
When we cross the street of gold
I never cry or hurt myself
I play and laugh
And sing a lot

And hear you when you pray
Mummy dear, don't be angry
With God
You see, he loves me too

God and Jesus are mentioned far more often in Norwegian than in Swedish messages. This is especially noticeable in messages written by teenagers. When Trond was killed in a traffic accident at 15 years of age, three girls from his school class wrote: "God loves to pick flowers, and now he has picked the finest one, that's you, Trond". Several other school friends mention God in their memorial messages about Trond. Numerous Norwegian messages state that a person's life is a loan from God which He can reclaim sooner or later. When Johanne, aged 15, died in a traffic accident in 2004, Elin wrote a poem to her parents in which God speaks. The poem begins: "For a time I've loaned you (i.e. the parents) a child of mine, said God, love her while she is on earth, and weep when she receives word. To return to me again".

At the same time there are some instances in Norway of a certain criticism being directed towards God. When the above-mentioned Johanne died in 2004 in a traffic accident, one of her school friends wrote: "God needed her in heaven. God was wrong, he was just unknowing". Criticism of this kind might be taken to indicate that God and even Jesus are more present in the human sphere of concept in Norway than in Sweden. In crisis situations it may therefore be easier to mention and approach God in Norway than it would appear to be in Sweden.

Muslim writers refer to both Allah's protection and to angels, which are of course named in the Koran (www.ne.se Islam). When five-month-old Mohammed Osmanaj died in 2004, his parents wrote: "We seek Allah's protection from shaitan's evil mind". A poem that was also published is the dead child speaking to his parents about what had happened:

Last night I imagined an angel came
And took me by the hand
We flew together far away
Over sea and land.

The deceased as angelic beings

A common concept is that children and young people become angels after death. This is in striking contrast to earlier beliefs when the deceased were supposed to be

souls, not angels. The British sociologist Tony Walter has also found a similar change in England (Walter 2011). The mothers of dead children call themselves "Mothers of Angels". In addition, there is a glorification of the deceased that is expressed by calling him or her the very best, finest or prettiest angel in heaven. One of Johan's sisters wrote when he died in 2008 at 21 years of age: "You are the most beautiful angel. ... God probably needed you". The deceased can continue to spread joy and humour in heaven just as she or he had done on earth. In the next of kin's sphere of belief, both the deceased's personal character and public way of living will continue on in a heavenly existence among the angels. The links between earthly life and life among the angels are obvious. When Anders died suddenly at 45 years of age, his wife wrote: "All the angels going to experience your good humour, the winds will spread the sound of angels laughing at your jokes". The deceased himself is considered to have got "angelic robes", and "they'll have to be black since you loved wearing black clothes".

There are some examples of belief in the deceased already having been an angel while on earth and having acted there as a loan to their relatives and friends. When Richard, aged 27, died of cancer in 2007, his mother wrote: "I got to borrow an angel who spread his light in my life with each breath". Similarly, when Madeleine died in 2007 at 15 years of age, one message read that "you have always been an angel and now you've got your glory". At a memorial church service in 2009 for the murdered siblings Max and Saga, their mother said: "I know that you both fit in living up there with the angels, because the only things you lacked here on earth were wings. And you got those a year ago" (*Aftonbladet*, 20 October 2010). In both the last-mentioned examples, a status as angels is considered to have become even more obvious after death than it was during life. The folklorist Bente Gullveig Alver has shown that earlier conceptions of a guardian angel have been greatly changed in modern neo-religiosity to become the angelic wings that human beings themselves receive (Alver 1999a). Individuals are glorified and more focussed upon than previously. The supernatural is relocated onto the individual from the outside and then accompanies her even after death into a new existence.

One might expect that only the best individuals would be able to become angels. This is not the case, however. There are a number of messages that speak of and regret the deceased's drug addiction that brought him (they are generally young men) to an early death. A sister of the Daniel who died in 2007 aged 33, writes: "Drugs determined your fate, they took you from us. My beloved brother has become an angel, he has left us here below". There are also messages about other deceased persons that describe their drug addiction without mentioning any form of existence after death. Some form of criticism towards the deceased does occur because of the addiction that led to his death, however. When Mikael died in an auto accident at 25 years of age

2 The mother of the deceased daughter has written: "Hugs from your beloved mother". The angel has both halo and wings and may be thought to be the daughter. (www.tillminneav.se/showPage.php?id=34).

in 2008, his mother wrote: "What were you doing in that car after you'd been drinking, you know I hated that!!, but now it's too late and I can't stop you". Nevertheless, love is also expressed when the mother continues: "Nothing can stop me/us from loving you – you were my all deep in my soul".

While the conception of the deceased having become an angelic being is quite common, there are fewer examples of her or him being conceived of as a *star* and then as a particularly lovely star. After five-month-old Isak died in 2008, the comment about him was that "heaven has been blessed with a glittering star".

Conceptions about stillborn infants

When a child dies in the womb it is not unusual for a mother in Sweden, but not in Norway, to write one or more messages on memorial websites, often over a long period of time. This is especially true on the anniversary of the delivery which is seen as being the birthday of the lost child. This usually results in several guest book messages from other mothers who have lost children in the same way. They affirm that they recognize themselves in the tragic situation. The mothers often describe how they really began to sense the child and feel its movements in the womb, and then their grief that it was not born alive. The moment when they learned that the heartbeat on the prenatal ultrasound had stopped was especially heartbreaking. Despite their grief, parents often published a photograph of the stillborn infant, who was always given a first name. These photographs may be thought shocking by outsiders, but they have

an undoubted therapeutic function for the parents. They will prove that they had a child that is loved even if it was stillborn. For research-ethical reasons, I have chosen not to show any such pictures here. Some parents post a photograph of the stillborn infant's gravestone. Such gravestones have become increasingly common in both Norway and Sweden during the 1990s and 2000s (see chapter 2). In addition to the parents, the mother's parents can also write and express their grief and despair both for their daughter's grief and for their own loss of a longed-for grandchild.

Conceptions of faith are often, but not always, also expressed in these messages. In the latter instances the description ends with the tragedy. The afflicted then do not go on to try to discover something that can help them find relief from sorrow. The parents of Junior, who died in 1998, wrote: "You are our first and long-awaited child. But instead of having you with us, we now have a grave to care for. How can life be so cruel?" In contrast to this statement is the often-expressed declaration about the stillborn infant being an angel. This angel was in a hurry to return to heaven where the other angels dwelled. The idea that the infant was a loan occasionally occurs. In such cases God is sometimes named. Elisabeth´s parents wrote after she died in 2009 that "God took back his finest angel. You were a loan we will never forget". Angels are most often mentioned, however, without God being named. A diffuse Christian faith can be a motivation for this even without being clearly expressed. Mothers can call themselves angel-mommies. The infant will not be lonely in the other world, but will always play with other angel-children. A picture of a child with angel's wings can be included. The infant's existence on the far side of death is seen as being a very real life. This is especially noticeable in messages that are written on anniversaries of the delivery. Parents can then imagine a definite birthday party in heaven and even send up a balloon. On the second anniversary of Tobias' death, his mother wrote: "Have a wonderful party together with all your little angel friends". On the fourth an-

3 A gravestone dated to 2001 over the stillborn infant Lina Gradin Öhlund. The gravestone is heart-shaped as an expression of love and is also adorned with the engraved figure of an angel. (www.smaanglar.org/)

niversary, the mother noted that "it has become something of a tradition for me to write letters to you on each anniversary". She continues: "This year we celebrated your birthday with a cake as usual, but we will also send up a balloon to you. ... We will stand there and look up at the sky as your balloon flies off, and maybe you are sitting somewhere up there and can catch it".

In some cases parents state that they believe or in other cases say that after their own deaths they know they will see their child again in some often diffuse future. According to some messages angels are supposed to be there too. A future reunion of this kind is depicted in positive phrases and will never end. The parents and siblings of the twins Elliot and Viktor who died in 2002 write that "that day is going to be wonderful". Such positive visions of the future also occur in Norway. The mother of Adelsofie who died in 2006, writes with confidence to her lost infant: "Play with your angel friends and meet Mummy on the day when I come up to you! I'm looking forward to embracing you! ... I do so hope that I will come to you in angel-land where time does not exist".

In some cases personal poems are published in which the parents as well as the dead infant express themselves. The infant can say that it exists in some other place and that it is happy. This does not always mean a life among angels but can even be a diffuse existence out in space. The parents of Lucas who died in 2006 write: "Don't be sad, I'm not sleeping. I am a thousand winds that blow. ... I am the gentle stars that light your way home at night. Don't be so sad, I am with you, I am in the light, I am free". The dead child has got agency. Words like these can assist in comforting the surviving next of kin.

A final characteristic of the memorial websites for stillborn infants can be said to be that they really do not differ in any way from those websites relating to living children who have died. In their reactions of grief, parents do not differ between a living and a stillborn child. Children are seen as coming to a different and supernatural existence where, inter alia, they meet angels. They can also become angels themselves. They have been borrowed whether they had been born alive or had died in the womb. After their own deaths, parents anticipate meeting both stillborn infants and children who had lived on earth. Their grief is not only focussed on the death of a child born alive, but also concerns a stillborn child. This emotional parental equality regarding both stillborn and full-born children has become obvious since the 1990s, as is shown on children's gravestones in both Norway and Sweden (see chapter 2).

Concluding remarks

This study has shown how much information is available to scholars in cultural science about conceptions of belief through a study of memorial websites over deceased persons on the Internet. These websites are primarily set up for children and young people, regardless of whether they died suddenly or after a shorter or longer period of sickness. The attention given to stillborn infants is similar to that given living children who have died. The writing is done mostly by women – mothers, sisters, girlfriends, wives or partners. This act of writing acquires a therapeutic function in the grieving process because the memorial websites transmit contacts with other women who have experienced comparably intense grief. New fellowships arise and they are not restricted concerning space.

An examination of the messages' content often reveals a conception of some form of supernatural belief in a heavenly existence after death. This is not always stated, but it is seldom denied. Even those who have never previously held such a conception of belief have at times changed when confronted by a death in the immediate family, and have begun to adopt some form of belief that is individual and not traditionally Christian.

Ideas about a supernatural existence vary on a scale ranging from the diffuse to the fairly concrete. In these latter instances, the existence resembles or equals the deceased's way of life on earth. In order to reach heaven, the deceased must climb an unendingly long stairway. Up there, she or he can become acquainted with other deceased individuals even if they have not had previous social contact. Association and fellowship can then arise. The heavenly existence also includes supernatural beings that have not lived on earth. These are primarily angels who are thought to care well for the deceased. These latter can also become angels if they are not already believed to have achieved this during their earthly life. The concept angel has then replaced the earlier usual concept soul. An existence among angels is entirely positive. Neither darkness nor punishment occurs after death, as is fully in line with present-day neo-religious movements. Even those who destroyed their own lives due to misuse of alcohol or drugs can enjoy a positive existence after death and live among the angels. They themselves can even become angels. This gives very real comfort to the next of kin who regret the deceased's alcohol and drug addiction.

Belief in angels is not only linked to a traditional Christian religiosity but also to neo-religious movements. Christian faith is expressed when God and/or Jesus are named. Similarly, Muslim faith is indicated by the mention of Allah and Paradise.

Opportunities for contact between the living and the dead can take place by the latter being believed to be able to read or at least participate in what is written on the memorial websites. Contacts can also occur in dreams. These dreams are considered

by the next of kin to be real meetings, and not merely empty fantasies. The verb *know,* rather than *believe*, is used in such connections. The deceased can also contact the living by watching over them like guardian angels. More concretely, the deceased can speak to the living in poems written and posted by the next of kin. In some cases, mediums can help relatives to get contact with the deceased even if this is not very often referred to on memorial websites.

The living believe that their ultimate contact with the deceased will occur after their own death. Afterwards no new death will part them but, unlike earthly life, the relationship will be everlasting. Finiteness is replaced by the everlasting, and joy is restored supremely. This is something to look forward to as a consolation in one's state of grief, and a concept of this kind is often expressed.

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9
Messages on memorial Internet websites relating to suicide in Norway and Sweden

In chapter 8 I presented a study of messages published on memorial Internet websites relating to death in general. In the present chapter I will present my special study of memorial websites relating to persons who have committed suicide. I have found these websites set up at the same web addresses as those commemorating other deceased persons, for example www.tillminneav.se (to the memory of). Speaking openly about suicide is both remarkable and unique when contrasted with the reticence of former days. Messages expressed in these exceptional situations have not previously been subjected to scientific analysis. The aim of the present study is to determine which elements are common to memorial websites for both suicides and other categories of deceased persons, and which are distinctive. In addition, a comparison will be made between conditions in Sweden and in Norway. It should be noted that there are about 1 500 suicides in Sweden each year (www.ne.se Självmord) and about 500 in Norway (www.levenorge.no).

This research deals with memorial websites that have become available during 2009 and 2010 in Norway and Sweden. The all-inclusive issue in the present study concerns how mourners express their emotions, experiences and concepts of belief regarding the deceased person. This can be done verbally, by publishing written descriptions and poems, or illustratively, by using pictures such as photographs or pictorial symbols. Do concepts of a life after death exist and how are these expressed? What is the deceased's status considered to be on the other side and is she or he accessible in any way for the mourners? Can the dead be aware of and perceive the messages that the living send to them? Is any form of dialogue possible with them? Can the living at some future time after their own deaths be reunited with their dead loved ones and friends? These questions are identical to those I raised in chapter 8 of memorial websites for deceased persons who had not committed suicide.

This chapter can play a part in the discussion about greater outspokenness concerning death, compared to the prevalent silence and tabooing of the 1900s. How candid do close relatives and friends of the deceased dare to be in speaking of suicide

on the Internet? How must one respond, not only to societal norms, but also to the fact that these can change with the passage of time?

Reticence concerning suicide has a historic basis in that an action of this kind once constituted a crime against the state. Suicides were not allowed to be buried in the sanctified terrain of a churchyard, but were instead buried in a secret location somewhere in a forest. This is clearly stated in the section on criminal deeds in the Swedish law of 1734. The criminalization of suicide ceased with the new Swedish Criminal Code adopted in 1864. Changes in the Ecclesiastical Law at the same time allowed suicides to be buried in churchyards, although only in secluded corners and in private, i.e. with no ringing of the church bells. The coffin was not borne in through the churchyard gate but lifted over the churchyard wall, as has been told in numerous folk-life records. In some districts there were special stairs cut into the churchyard wall for this specific purpose. A new law on funerals passed in 1908 eliminated the provision requiring private funerals for suicides. They were now allowed the same form of funeral as other deceased persons (Pleijel 1983:57ff, Odén et al 1998:11ff). A negative opinion of suicides and their burial persisted, however, far longer in folk tradition. The despised northernmost corner of the churchyard was called "self-waster's cranny" or "suicide's corner". As the ethnologist Louise Hagberg, who wrote about death in folk tradition, states in a book published in 1937: "The horror of suicides is still deeply rooted, however. Even now there are those who find it extremely improper that suicides are allowed burial in the churchyard alongside respectable people. Suicides are generally considered in many places to have misused their right to be buried in sanctified earth" (Hagberg 1937:504).

In Norway, Christian V's Norwegian Law of 1687 stated that suicides were not to be buried in a churchyard. This regulation was abolished in 1842 (Nybø 2007:17), or 22 years earlier than in Sweden. A prohibition on the graveside ceremony of sprinkling earth on the coffin was retained until 1897. After this date only the aiding and abetting of suicide is considered a punishable act.

I Distinctive characteristics of memorial websites relating to suicidal acts

1) Criticism directed towards the deceased in Sweden and Norway

One feature that is clearly specific to memorial websites relating to suicide is the criticism expressed in many cases towards the deceased. In *Sweden* this criticism is based on the deceased's not having considered the suffering she or he has brought upon the closest relatives, who are left feeling completely helpless. A young man named Janne took his own life when he and his girlfriend were 19 years of age. They had met in the evening, and had hugged and kissed each other. That same night he gassed him-

self to death, despite having said to his girlfriend, "see you tomorrow". She expresses her anger in the following way: "Oh, how mad I was at him. How could he do this to me? We who had planned to sit there together at the old peoples' home, drinking beer and smoking Marlboros" (www.metrobloggen.se). Other messages speak of the act of betrayal committed by the deceased towards those closest to him. Close relatives even express their anger over what has happened in newspaper articles. The newspaper *Aftonbladet* had an article in 2010 in which the ex-partner of the actor Micke Dubois, who had committed suicide in 2005, declared: "I have been so bloody mad at him for leaving me and our three children. Sometimes I've just wanted to dig Micke up so I could hit him. But those feelings come less and less often" (*Aftonbladet*, 5 March 2010).

A different form of criticism expressed in *Norway* is more negative than in Swedish messages, namely that suicide is an expression of egoism or cowardice in those that commit this action. The author of a poem entitled "Silje" writes:

> I remember your death,
> still beautiful, but gone ...
> I thought you were a coward
> Who didn't dare continue on.
> Did you find the peace you sought?
> (www.levenorge.no/til_minne).

Erika wrote in a message on 19 September 2006: "Committing suicide is just so egoistic! Giving all that pain to those one supposedly loves is unthinkable to me. ... What I see now is that if it hadn't been for my mum's egoism I could maybe still have had a mother. And that's what I don't have. Maybe it's sad that she didn't find enough joy in caring for me. But to let me grow up motherless is just so egoistic!"

Some of the other Norwegian messages written by close relatives have, however, questioned so negative an attitude towards those who have taken their lives. This is clearly expressed in Krokoline's blog (www.krokoline.vgb.no) in which she opposes the view that suicide is an egoistic action. Thea wrote a message on 17 September 2006 in support of Krokoline's opinion: "Oh! HURRAH for what you wrote! I do so agree with you! A person who was really close to me took her own life and then it's really provoking when people call suicide egoistic. The person I knew who took her life was really down and couldn't see any light at the end of the tunnel. I do so understand her. Great that there's finally a blog here that spreads some sense. HURRAH! Once more!" Krokoline closed this blog on 7 April 2007. This may indicate that she considered the answering messages to have given her success in what she was striving for, namely an attempt to alter prevailing attitudes.

2) Self-reproach in Swedish messages

On Swedish memorial websites, near relatives frequently express the fact that the suicide was totally unexpected and that they had had no prior indications. This applies especially to suicides who had not shown signs of mental disturbance or had been undergoing any form of psychiatric treatment. The totally unexpected leads to anxiety and self-reproach among the nearest relatives. Had they been unaware of something in their contacts with the deceased that could have hindered the suicide? When a 17-year-old girl named Tammi took her life in 2009, her family expressed their despair in the following way: "Tammi did not leave a letter for us. ... Why didn't we notice how sick she was? Why didn't we understand that she didn't want to live? What have we done wrong? What should we have done? How should we have met her? We just didn't see her inner demons. ... We didn't realize how strong those inner demons were" (www.tillminneav.se). Such candid statements occur fairly often in Sweden, but hardly ever in Norway, where reticence in expressing inner emotions concerning suicide appears to be greater.

Relatives have spoken not only of inner demons, but in some cases also about outer factors in the deceased's lifestyle when they try to find reasons for why the suicide occurred so unexpectedly. The mother of the nineteen-year-old Robert who took his life in 2006 expresses her thoughts in this way: "Was there too much partying and too many computer games at night, too little sleep and too heavy demands at school. ... Robert was a very sensitive person but kept everything locked up inside him" (www.freewebs.com/robbansminne/). When Christian took his life, the reason appears to have been the debts he had contracted in overly enthusiastic poker playing. His mother expresses her despairing wonder in the following way on 3 March 2008, sixteen months after her son's death: "What crime have we committed to be sentenced for life in this way? A life-long sentence with an obligation to survive!" (www.christiansellergren.se).

In other cases relatives refuse to speculate and reason about the grounds for the death, but are left, on the other hand, completely shocked and unable to comprehend their own suffering. They also express a desire to pardon what has happened and that they love, grieve for and remember the deceased. Love, grief and remembrance are key words on memorial websites for all deceased in general, as they are here in relating to suicide.

In instances of other types of sudden death, due to accident, murder or manslaughter (see chapter 7) the nearest relatives are not burdened with the same self-reproach for not having done enough to hinder the incident. The death has been caused by external events (traffic accidents, boat accidents, or murderers), and not by the deceased's mental condition and anguish for which assistance and proper care might have been arranged.

3) Criticism of psychiatric treatment in Sweden and Norway

In other cases suicide has not been as unexpected as in the above examples. This is when the deceased has been under psychiatric treatment for lengthier or shorter periods of time. Criticism by the relatives is then directed, not towards the deceased, but towards this treatment, which is seen as having been inadequate. The shortcomings are considered to have been largely responsible for the suicide. This can refer to, for example, unsatisfactory supervision of the patient that has allowed her or him to commit suicide in an unguarded moment. Ehline took her own life in 2007 at 31 years of age. On 29 January 2009 her mother wrote on her memorial blog: "Ehline's 33rd birthday would have been tomorrow, but psychiatry took that from us. ... Those people in psych. care should know how Ehline's family feel, they just don't understand what they've done to us. I often write about how angry I am with psychiatry and I know I've a right to that. ... The way they prescribe pills for patients and then tell me about their bad side effects. You get scared just listening. And there's a lot of profit-making in it. ... I'm never going to get over everything that's happened and I'm going to fight to get a change in psychiatric care. Patients need more than pills, they need to talk to someone ... but psych. care can't be bothered to help them". On 20 April 2009 this mother wrote: "38 different kinds of pills in 7 months – anyone can see that this won't help a sick person" (www.minneavehline.blogg.se). Newspapers also revealed shortcomings in psychiatric care in interviews with relatives, especially those of well-known artists such as the actors Micke Dubois (who died in 2005) and Johanna Sällström (who died in 2006). As Sällström's father informed the newspaper *Ystads Allehanda* in 2007: "There was no treatment in the real sense of the word. She was kept doped with psycho-drugs. And she was massaged a little by a physiotherapist. But it was mostly a matter of keeping her quiet at the hospital" (*Ystads Allehanda*, 4 May 2007).

This form for clearly expressed criticism of psychiatric care by the deceased's relatives is also found in *Norway*. Just as in Sweden, it is also taken up in newspaper interviews with close relatives. The press then agrees with the criticism of society's system of care as revealed by these relatives. On 2 December 2004 the newspaper *VG* devoted an entire page to a case of this kind. "Berit (aged 49) hung herself in the hospital smoking room. That was the only place Norwegian psychiatry could find to put her. Her daughter is shocked. ... This daughter fought the psychiatric health service desperately for three years trying to keep her mother alive. She lost that battle. ... Now I'm going to fight on so that no one else will feel as helpless and alone as I did, says the daughter to *VG*" (*VG*, 2 December 2004). On 15 February 2005 the newspaper *Dagbladet* took up another case of suicide at a psychiatric ward in Oslo. Here one critical comment was that "psychiatry is still regarded with silence. This makes it even more important for the press to throw light on a system that endangers human life" (*Dagbladet*, 15 February 2005).

4) Swedish repudiation of suicide guides

A subject dealt with in numerous Swedish messages, and also in the media, is a strong rejecting of the suicide guides found on the Internet. In such guides, potential suicides can learn about various methods for taking their own lives. Some of those who did commit suicide obviously visited these websites. Christian's mother wrote a long article on his memorial website entitled "The worst day of my life". In it she describes how she and her husband found Christian dead of carbon monoxide poisoning in the bathroom of his apartment. He had deliberately inhaled the poisonous fumes. The parents searched his laptop. His mother writes: "We spent that whole weekend checking his laptop for clues. Using different links, we could trace what he had been reading on his laptop in those last hours. We clicked on the links and arrived at different sites with precise descriptions of how to succeed in committing suicide. It just makes you sick to know that there actually are people who publish such sites. Christian found sites describing how to light a charcoal grill in a closed room, and that's exactly what he did. So that nobody else would get hurt, he tacked a warning note on the door (we didn't see it, the ambulance personnel took it down), 'Danger. Carbon monoxide. Poisonous!' " (www.christiansellergren.se). In a guestbook message posted on Christian's memorial website on 19 September 2008, Bella wrote about her own experiences that could easily have resulted in suicide: "Was so sick a while back. Had taken an overdose and landed in the IVA [intensive care unit, author's note], but I'm much better now. Have visited sites with suicide guides, but get so angry that those things exist! And that they're still there".

Relatives of suicides have worked even more actively in recent time to have these guides forbidden. A blogger, who advocates the ideal of "no suicides" after having lost his father due to suicide in 2005, wrote on 21 October 2010: "Close these suicide-promoting sites. A campaign has been started to get a legal prohibition on suicide sites. Click here to support us. ... If mercy killing is illegal, encouraging others to take their own lives shouldn't be permitted either" (www.nollsuicid.blogg.se). Articles in Swedish newspapers have also focussed on suicide guides and supported a ban on them. The *Göteborgs-Posten* for 16 October 2010 carries the article "Suicide sites – support or risk?" commenting on the demands now being put forth for a Swedish ban on sites that promote suicide. Among those quoted is Gunilla Wahlén, the president of SPES [the Swedish association for the prevention of suicide and support of survivors, author's note]. She fully supports removal of the harmful suicide sites on the Net. This has been done in France and Portugal. Norway prohibits all aid to suicide. A prohibition of this kind is a precondition for achieving the goal of nil suicides among young people (*Göteborgs-Posten*, 16 October 2010). The media researcher Michael Westerlund, who published his doctoral thesis "Suicide and the Internet" in 2010, refers to case studies showing that individuals have taken their own lives or at-

tempted suicide after finding information about suicide methods on the Internet. In 1995 Portugal prohibited all forms of propaganda supporting suicide or instructing about suicide techniques. A similar prohibition was adopted in France in 2002. Australia criminalized Internet sites promoting suicide starting in 2006. The principal website in Sweden, entitled www.sjalvmord.com, was started in 2005 (Westerlund 2010: 75 ff). In May 2011 was one website with suicide guides closed after hard criticisms on the Internet (*Göteborgs-Posten,* 5 May 2011). I have not found information about such sites in Norway, something that should be seen as a result of the prohibition on suicide assistance.

5) Norwegian scepticism to memorial websites

In Norway, in contrast to Sweden, scepticism towards memorial websites for suicides has been expressed fairly often, since it is thought that they could tempt others to commit suicide. An emotional contagion (sometimes known as "spillover effect") might occur, especially if those who have taken their own lives are honoured and glorified. It is also considered ethically indefensible to praise someone who has committed suicide and therefore caused immense psychological suffering to close relatives. A woman wrote on 5 May 2008 concerning a situation she experienced in her family: "When it comes to sites like these being able to trigger suicide: my in-laws have set up a site at gonetoosoon in memory of my brother-in-law who committed suicide last summer. I thought at first this was a good idea, and for some it is almost a kind of therapy to open the site and read everything posted there, and to write themselves about how much they miss him. ... But I can also see the dangers in this, when the deceased is glorified and set up on a pedestal and almost presented like a hero. There's nothing there saying that he took his own life, or that he chose to leave his three children in that way. Many of us in the family still feel anger, why couldn't he have talked to someone about how he felt, instead of choosing the 'easy way out'? Such things are not often written about on these sites. You're somehow not supposed to talk about it. ... I'm not in favour of making people better than they are, just because they're dead. I just wish my brother-in-law's kids could learn more about why their daddy's dead, instead of being taught that he's a hero who carried out a brave deed" (www.forum.kvinneguiden.no). I have not encountered similarly critical statements about memorial websites in Sweden. There is a greater moderation in Norway, almost unwillingness, to talk about committed suicides. This indicates that the former and very strong taboo on suicide, including a feeling of shame, is obviously more lasting in Norway. A Norwegian woman who lost her husband due to suicide in 2008 wrote a poem about what had happened. One verse reads:

I have a husband,
And my children have a father!
But why is it so hard to speak of him?
Should we be ashamed?
Should we feel guilt?
Concealment hurts.
(www.levenorge.no/tilminne)

In Norway there is a "National association for the surviving relatives of suicides", abbreviated LEVE ["Live"] (in Norwegian). Trude, who lost her sister because of suicide, praises LEVE as "a fantastic organization", but also adds: "How odd that it has so few members. Says something about this still being a tabooed subject" (www.facebook.jp). There are comparable support groups in Sweden that have played an important role for surviving relatives. These groups have been met with considerable sympathy and not with the same scepticism as in Norway. "The national association for the prevention of suicide and support of survivors", abbreviated SPES (in Swedish), founded as early as 1987, has about 1 500 members (www.spes.nu, Westerlund 2010:185). There is also a "West-Swedish network for suicide prevention", abbreviated WNS. Older traditions are not discarded in Norway as easily as in Sweden, however, as can also be shown in other connections having to do with death (see below).

6) Moderation relating to suicide in Swedish and Norwegian media

One might ask what the attitude of the media concerning the mention of suicide can have meant for people's interest in discussing such events on the Internet and in expressing themselves on the memorial websites there.

Paragraph 8 of the Swedish regulations for press ethics reads: "Show extreme caution in press coverage of suicide and attempted suicide, especially as regards the survivors and what is stated above concerning the sanctity of private life" (www.po.se, cf. Westerlund 2010:12).

The question of whether to mention suicide became current with the death of the wrestler and European Champion Mikael Ljungberg on 17 November 2004. The journalist Jimmy Fredriksson wrote an article published two days later in the *Göteborgs Tidningen* and entitled "We have to dare talk about it". He observes that "suicide is the most tabooed subject in Sweden. Actually, it doesn't even exist. We are brought up to say nothing about suicide, those of us in the press writing about it only in extremely rare circumstances. ... If suicide is mentioned, everyone stops talking". Fredriksson then mentions Mikael Ljungberg's death, noting that "most people's first reaction was to quiet down what had happened. Suicide fosters thoughts of guilt and shame". This

has to change, according to the author: "We have to realize that it's wrong to try to hide a societal problem that takes three times more lives than traffic accidents. Instead, we need an information campaign about suicide. We need a debate. We have to dare talk about people who take their own lives and to discuss why. Lives can be saved. ... Parents must be helped to recognize the signals of suicide. ... The taboo stamp must be removed. It may be that the debate and discussion that followed Mikael Ljungberg's death can help to do this" (*Göteborgs Tidningen,* 19 November 2004). On 15 December 2004 the managing editor of *Expressen*, Thomas Mattsson, continued in the same vein as Fredriksson. After Ljungberg's death, Mattsson promises, "we are going to write about suicide more often, about why it takes place and also report on the danger signals. This can help our readers and may even save lives. A self-imposed censor cannot, after all, benefit the treatment of the suicidal. ... Our newspaper will wipe out the taboo saying that suicide should not be spoken of or written about, a relic of the age when it was a crime to take your own life" (www.medievarlden.se). It is obvious that Ljungberg's death caused a change in the media. On 18 October 2005 the publisher of *Journalisten*, Qia Rindewall, wrote an article entitled "More suicides in the media" (www.journalisten.se). It can thus be said that Fredriksson's and Mattsson's expressly desired goal has been reached and their battle cries answered after 2004. It is in this period of time that more and more memorial websites are established for persons who have committed suicide. Here there appears to be a connection with the increased openness demanded and shown by the media in recent years.

Paragraph 4. 9 of the current *Norwegian Code of Ethics* for the press ("Vær Varsom-plakaten") reads: "Be cautious when reporting on suicide and attempted suicide. Avoid reporting that is not necessary for meeting a general need for information. Avoid description of methods or other matters that may contribute to provoking further suicidal actions" (www.presse.no/Pressensfagligeutvalg, jfr Westerlund 2010:12). This code of ethics applies as from 1 January 2006, while the previous code in effect from 1936 stated that "suicide or attempted suicide shall, as a general rule, not be reported on" in the press. The difference in comparison with the Swedish code of ethics is that the last sentence of the current code warns against the danger of provoking new suicidal actions.

The work of revising the Code of Ethics' paragraph 4.9 prior to 2006 was led by the journalist Reidun Kjelling Nybø. She was commissioned by the Norwegian Press Association to draw up a guide as to how suicides should be mentioned. The result of her work with these questions has been recounted for in the book "From taboo to topic. Suicide in the media" (*Fra tabu til tema. Selvmord i mediene"*), published in 2007. The main title of the book indicates clearly that the author wishes to show that a change has taken place in the media's praxis. Nybø's guide is found on pages 107 to 114. As a general rule she states that "the changes in the Code's paragraph 4.9 *do*

not mean that the media can now freely and uncritically report on every single suicide or attempted suicide. It is still the case that the great majority of suicides belong to a person's innermost being and private sphere. But in some instances it will be proper for the media to report on suicide as a general societal problem and, at times, also on individual suicides" (Nybø 2007:108). There are two main reasons for showing consideration in any report of suicide and attempted suicide. One is the danger of influencing others, especially young people, to commit suicide. The other has to do with a consideration of the closest relatives and the deceased's posthumous reputation. "Despite increased openness, this is still a tabooed topic" (Nybø 2007:109f).

There was also a great deal of debate in the media in 2005 before the new Code of Ethics was adopted and began to be applied as of 1 January 2006. The newspaper *Dagbladet* ran a five-page report on 8 February 2005 about Katherine, aged 19, who took her life in a psychiatric emergency room in Oslo. Most of the text was based on Kathrine's mother's revelations. She emphasized that "my only hope is that making this story public will stop this happening to others" (*Dagbladet,* 8 February 2005). The article was reported to the Norwegian Press Council ("Pressens faglige utvalg", abbreviated PFU) which on 25 April 2005 resolved that "*Dagbladet* had not violated ethical press conduct". The Council noted that the Code of Ethics was under revision and that "opinions about suicide and attempted suicide have changed in the past few years. The press has increasingly chosen to focus on the underlying causes of suicide as a societal and medical problem" (www.pfu.no, Nybø 2007:68 ff). The debate continued with the article "Should suicide be discussed?" written by the journalist Knut Olav Åmås and published in *Aftenposten* on 26 May 2005. He observed that "suicide is still partly tabooed by society, but changes in mentality have taken place that have also led the media to publish numerous background stories focussed on suicide, with details often provided after the event by the next of kin". The journalist favoured a continued restraint in the media concerning suicide, and ended by writing that "the media can at best contribute by making suicide a less tabooed topic in society and by focussing on viewpoints that can help individuals who find themselves in a difficult situation and also those close to them" (*Aftenposten*, 26 May 2005).

The two college lecturers Hege Lamark and Jan-Erik Andreassen wrote an article in 2007 about the Norwegian media's references to suicide in the year 2006. They observed that "one year after the changes in the press's Code of Ethics, we find a great many articles about suicide in the media", but that "local newspapers almost never mention suicide at all". The authors are pleased, however, that seen as a whole, "the taboo associated with suicide has been weakened, and suicide can be made an open topic" (*Suicidologi*, 2007, no 2).

Krokoline, whose father had committed suicide by hanging, also evaluates this first year with the new Code of Ethics in her blog of December 2006. She is more pes-

simistic than Lamark and Andreassen, stating that "it is difficult to get the press to report on the suicide problematic. It seems as if it's better to sweep suicide statistics under the carpet together with all the other awful dust bunnies". She hopes that the media will begin to write more about "preventing suicide or what it's like to survive someone who's committed suicide". Her experiences indicate something different, however: "The newspapers I contact about this just don't get a move on" (www.krokoline.vgb.no). The journalist Reidun Kjelling Nybø also observes in her book of 2007 that "there is still a great deal of taboo connected to suicide" in the Norwegian media (Nybø 2007:10).

Generally speaking, one sees that it is just in the late 2000s that a few memorial websites for people who have committed suicide begin appearing, although to a far lesser extent than in Sweden. The somewhat greater openness in the media after the appearance of the new Code of Ethics may have been a source of inspiration. All in all, however, it has been more difficult in Norway than in Sweden to break with an earlier and established tradition concerning reticence in writing and speaking of suicide.

II Similarities to memorial websites over other deceased persons

1) A belief in an afterlife in Sweden

Despite their sorrow, sense of loss and shock, some Swedish statements and guestbook messages show that close relatives find comfort in believing that the person who died by suicide can have come to a different existence after death. It is believed to be better than the life the deceased once had and consciously chose to leave. This new existence is, however, conceived of as being diffuse, in keeping with the conceptions expressed about other present-day deceased persons. These are not traditional religious conceptions. No thoughts of punishment after death are expressed. This corresponds fully with the neo-religious conceptions of "the regained paradise" written about by the folklorist Bente Gullveig Alver (Alver 1999b). A message about Maja, who committed suicide in 2009 when 26 years of age, notes: "She chose to go on to a new life, where she is probably happier than here on earth" (www.evigaminnen.se). Daniela's mother conceives of her daughter's afterlife as being more tangible and resembling what is best here on earth. She writes on 8 November 2007: "I hope that Christian and my Daniela have become pals in a warm country with sunny beaches" (www.christiansellergren.se).

The surviving relatives are also believed to be able to make contact with the deceased in the latter's new existence. After Johan committed suicide in 2005 at the age of 44, a sister wrote: "I talk to you every day, hope you hear me, see me, and are with

me. Love you forever" (www.tillminneav.se). In some cases, contact with the deceased is said to have taken place with the aid of a medium. A year after Robert, aged 19, had committed suicide, his mother wrote on 25 April 2007: "Robert's older sister visited a medium yesterday, the 24th, and she contacted Robert". He said that "he misses us very much and is with us down here and watches over us". His mother gained some comfort from this. At the same time, she became "terribly unhappy" on learning that he had said he hadn't meant to take his life. "He just wanted to scare us and it went too far" (www.freewebs.com/robbansminne/). Mediums have also been consulted in cases of death other than suicides. Such conceptions about mediums and their prospects of making contact with a supernatural world are fundamental to the neo-religious movement called New Age (Gilhus and Mikaelsson 2005:166 ff).

Numerous messages also mention the probability of a reunion between the surviving relatives and the deceased in some vague future. This is the same conception that is often linked to other deceased persons. A sister of the Pierre who took his life in 2005 when 20 years of age, writes: "I hope you will meet all of us, one after the other, with wide-open arms when it's our turn to come to the other side, because I know you are there somewhere and are waiting for us" (www.tillminneav.se).

The deceased can also meet *angels* in the afterlife who care for him or her. There are some cases in which the "City of angels" is mentioned. As Christian's mother wrote on Christmas Eve 2007: "Hope you have as happy a Christmas as possible up there in the city of angels, my dear boy!" (www.christiansellergren.se). When angels are mostly spoken of as supernatural or divine beings, this is on a line with the neo-religious New Age conceptions in which God is less present (Alver 1999a).

The deceased can also be conceived of as being an angel, as other deceased persons in Sweden often are. This is more frequently spoken of than are conceptions of angels helping the deceased.

A glorification of the deceased often occurs in which the latter is seen as being the best angel that can be found. After Robin took his life in 2008 when 20 years old, his mother wrote to him: "Robin, now you're a real angel, the loveliest, most wonderful angel in the whole universe. Sleep well, my child, we'll meet again some day" (www.tillminneav.se). Here one might ask if a glorification of this kind could tempt others into committing suicide, as is a widespread belief in Norway. The conception of the deceased's getting the form of an angel and even of being the best, finest and loveliest angel also concurs with conceptions on Swedish memorial websites for other deceased persons (see chapter 8). Upon becoming an angel, the deceased is thought to be able to watch over and protect the surviving relatives on earth. The mother of the above-mentioned Ehline, who had committed suicide in 2007, wrote on 23 May 2009: "I hope she is with us in heaven and protects her brothers and me and those little ones (grandchildren, author's note) who will soon be here" (www.minneavehline.blogg.se).

"Wishing you angel-blessings today and always". (www.minne avehline.blogg.se).

In *Norway* one does not encounter conceptions of an existence after death for those who have committed suicide. Angels are, therefore, not mentioned either. There is not only more reticence in Norway about speaking of suicide, whether in the media or between private persons. There also appears to be more keeping to former negative beliefs about those who commit suicide with reference to a coming afterlife. Keeping to a conception of this kind makes it impossible to conceive of a bright, heavenly existence together with angels, or that the deceased could himself/herself become an angel. In this respect, the contrast with Sweden is very obvious. The stability of tradition is clearly more evident in Norway.

2 "Light a candle for my angel-child", wrote Ehline's mother on 31 October 2009 (www.min-neavehline.blogg.se).

2) The significance of writing on memorial websites in Sweden

The people writing messages on memorial websites for suicides are, firstly, women. They are the mothers, wives, partners, girlfriends or sisters of the deceased. This is in complete accord with that which is found on memorial websites for other deceased persons (see chapter 8). Numerous Swedish messages refer to the value of being able to talk and write about suicides that have occurred in the personal circle. But this increased openness in expressing oneself has been late in arriving, as numerous writers have confirmed. Alexandra was eight years old when her father took his life at age 33. She first became aware of this when she was 19 years old, which was something she subsequently regretted deeply. What is needed, in her opinion, is a far greater openness than was the case previously. She writes: "The advice I'll give you, based on my own experience and regardless of gender or age, is to TALK! ... Write about it! ... Even if you only meet silence or rejection from your surroundings, don't give up, there will always be someone who will help you feel less alone. ... In our day we have the Internet, organizations and support groups in different parts of the country. Go to them and talk to people who can sympathize with your thoughts and feelings" (www.ungaisorg.se).

Memorial websites can sometimes be developed to honour or even glorify the deceased, and not only to express distress or shock over what has taken place. When the nineteen-year-old Charlie committed suicide in 2008, his older sister wrote: "This page is a way to honour Charlie, a great guy" (www.tillminneav.se). Christian's mother, who had set up a memorial website about him, wrote on 30 September 2009: "I want you to know, Christian, that I'm so enormously proud of and so grateful for being the one who had the honour of being your mum" (www.christiansellergren.se).

The surviving relatives often comment on the psychological help they have re-

3 Ehline's (1976–2007) mother wrote about her grief and sense of loss on 4 September 2009: "Miss her so that my heart aches, it's so empty without her, I feel like this picture, tears run and you feel really down. You miss your old self when you were happy and didn't have this pain inside you" (www.minneavehline.blogg.se).

ceived by reading the comments and messages published in the guestbooks. Linnea's mother, who set up a blog after her 14-year-old daughter had thrown herself in front of a train, wrote the following about her experiences: "It means a great deal to me to know that there are so many of you out there who think about me, think about Linnea and understand our problems. Your comments mean so much to me. Both because then I know I'm not alone, and because I am often forced to point my thoughts in a new, different direction when I read the reactions to my messages" (www.ludmilla.se). Christian's mother noted on 23 November 2007 that "by today your homepage has had over 14 000 visitors. ... It is comforting to see that so many think of you and of us". On September 30 2009, the mother noted that "today the count registered over 50 000 visitors on your website, Christian! Unbelievable! I know that your fate has touched many people, but I would never have believed that the site would be visited by so many when I set it up" (www.christiansellergren.se). The comments posted on the memorial websites become a counterweight to and a help in coping with the sense of loss and grief, as Ehline's mother has wished to illustrate with a picture.

Memorial funds have even been created recently for those who have committed suicide, similar to the funds set up in memory of other deceased persons. The newspaper *Eskilstuna LNY* reported about a fund of this kind on 20 August 2008, and about a grant from it: "On Wednesday evening a ceremony was held for the first grants awarded from Zandra Perrault's Memorial Fund. Zandra Perrault, a girl from Eskilstuna, took her life nearly two years ago and her parents have now set up a fund in her memory" (www.eskilstuna.lny.se). This might easily be interpreted by outsiders as an idolization of the deceased, among whom the fact that she committed suicide would be seen as a negative action. The first instance of a memorial fund of this kind occurred after the death of the wrestler Mikael Ljungberg on 17 November 2004. In the sports section of *Dagens Nyheter* for 9 December 2004, mention is made that "Stig Strand has started a fund in Ljungberg's memory" (*Dagens Nyheter* Sport, 9 December 2004).

There are, in addition, a number of visitors on Swedish guestbooks relating to suicide who write that what they read about suicides on the memorial websites encouraged them not to take their own lives. They gained a clear understanding of how much suffering the suicide caused to the closest relatives and friends. The memorial websites have contributed, in other words, to the saving of lives, something that obviously contradicts the fear that they would tempt others to take their lives in what is called emotional contagion. Maria wrote on 23 October 2008: "I tried to take my own life in 2003 and 2004, but luckily I'm still here today. Understand how stupid it all was and that it was not the only answer. I wish you all the best" (www.christiansellergren.se). Andreas noted on 12 May 2009: "I'm glad you've not kept quiet about Christian's death. Information should be spread and no matter how hard it is to be one

of those doing the spreading, it does most certainly help a lot of people. Among others, it helped me, and still does help at the times when I most of all would like to leave life behind. I know that I can't do it because I love my family too much to cause them that sorrow (and it would be sorrow even if I'm not exactly a saint). But it's useful to be reminded of the pain, and understand that it's worth the struggle – not always for my own sake but really for those I love. Thanks, and keep up the good work!" (www.christiansellergren.se).

Tradition and change in a Norwegian-Swedish perspective

In general, this study has reached the conclusion that Norway is more restrained when it comes to expressing oneself about suicide. Former traditions have much more influence there than in Sweden, where changes have become more extensive during the 2000s. In *Sweden*, the differences between suicides and other deaths have been increasingly wiped out. A standardization has taken place comparable to what has occurred in many other areas of social life. Equality, not differentiation, is to concern all, according to the dominant political and medial norms that have become increasingly strong. In order to achieve equality, former boundaries separating people must be broken down. As ideas of equal worth for all people have become the great ideal, this is also expressed on the memorial websites for the deceased. The belief in some diffuse existence after death, conceptions of angels and a conviction about the surviving relatives' reunion with the person they have lost through suicide in some distant future is consistent with what is expressed on the memorial websites set up for deceased persons in general. This same consistency is valid with regard to questions of glorification and honouring of the deceased.

In *Norway* the boundary between suicide and other deaths is marked in an entirely different manner. Glorification or expressions of honour are unthinkable, since this could lead to others being tempted to new suicides. A so-called emotional contagion is to be hindered in every possible way. In Sweden, however, there is a clearly expressed conception about how messages on memorial websites can prevent suicide in that they show the unfortunate effects this has on the closest relatives.

In Norway there are no concepts of a bright afterlife or of angels in connection with committed suicides. The Norwegian material consisting of memorial websites about suicide is quantitatively meagre compared to all that exists in Sweden. This indicates that the former tabooing of suicide containing elements of shame obviously is greater in Norway. Reticence concerning speaking of and writing about suicide is also noticeable in the media's presentations, even though a certain moderation has occurred after the new and more liberal Code of Ethics for the Norwegian Press was

adopted in 2006. In Sweden, too, the media long showed reticence about mentioning personal names and writing articles about suicide. The death of the wrestler Mikael Ljungberg in 2004 came to result in a clearly observable change.

Even if equality and standardization have become the ideal in Sweden, there are also certain differences between the websites set up for those who have committed suicide and those who have died in other ways. This is shown by the criticism, and not only glorification, that can be expressed about those who have taken their lives. The deceased has caused extreme sorrow among the nearest relatives and friends. Criticism of this kind is even stronger in Norway than in Sweden. The words "egoism" and "cowardice" linked to the deceased are expressions that I have observed on Internet websites only in Norway.

One area in which criticism is similar between Norway and Sweden has to do with the shortcomings in psychiatric care. The similarity in this connection can be due to the fact that it is not the deceased, but instead society that has not accepted its responsibility and done more to prevent suicide. Extreme criticism is aimed in Sweden against the suicide guides that have recently begun to appear on the Internet, and that clearly further suicide through their descriptions of methods for taking one's own life. This criticism does not exist in Norway, because all forms of assistance to suicide are strictly forbidden by law.

An especially emotionally charged topic in Norway concerns suicide, attempted suicide and thoughts of suicide linked to homosexuality. The ethnologist Tone Hellesund studied this problem in the years 2002 to 2004 by interviewing twelve homosexual persons, half of them women and half of them men, who have attempted suicide or had thoughts of suicide (Hellesund 2008). My Norwegian Internet material contains no memorial websites for openly homosexual persons who have committed suicide.

Older traditions have been shown to survive longer in present-day Norway than in Sweden, even in other respects than memorial websites. In the latter country there is a greater tendency to adopt innovations and to leave the long-standing. This relates to the symbols on gravestones (chapter 2), the lack of pet cemeteries in Norway (chapter 6), and the far fewer memorial websites to dead pets (chapter 10). In addition, the messages posted on these websites are both shorter and less emotional than their counterparts in Sweden. Memorial websites to the deceased generally contain far more traditional Christian conceptions in Norway than in Sweden. This concerns, for example, references to God and Jesus. In Sweden one observes more of a diffuse, general religiosity that can remind one of New Age modes of thought in which individuals and the brightness of a coming existence have a prominent position (chapter 8).

It can be difficult to give an explicit answer as to why former traditions associated with the deceased in general and to suicides in particular have a stronger position in Norway. A more obvious degree of secularization clearly plays a role in

Sweden. Another factor is the individualism that in many ways has been shown to be more evident in Sweden than in Norway. This is especially noticeable in the choice of symbols on gravestones in recent times (chapter 2). In Sweden there is often a tendency to regard what is new as being positive, to focus on the cheerful events emphasized by the media. The result can be that one covers over anything that is sorrowful. Life's darkest moments can be given a brighter shape. In this respect, Norway can be seen as being more realistic in its preservation of older traditions and in not merely rejecting life's darker sides without further discussion.

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10
Expressions of faith and narratives about deceased pets on the Internet in Sweden compared with Norway and Germany

In this chapter I will present a pilot study on attitudes towards deceased pet cats. The fieldwork on which this study is based has been conducted on the Internet instead of through dialogues and interviews. Some comparisons are made with the memorial websites devoted to humans (chapter 8). The issues considered in this study focus on the way in which pet owners express their emotions and their faith when confronted with the reality of the animal's death, regardless of whether this has been caused by sickness or accident. Have the memories of and emotions regarding the pet assumed forms that resemble the way in which close relatives mourn a person who has died? Is the pet regarded as an integrated member of the family? Can conceptions about an existence after death for animals also be perceived and how are these expressed?

Swedish memorial websites for deceased pets, several of them in the form of discussion forums on which other people can post contributions and responses in a guest book, began to appear at about the time of the turn of the Millennium in 2000. They relate to an animal heaven (http://hem.fyristorg.com/djurens_himmel) and a feline graveyard (www.katt.nu/kyrko-minnes.htm) (cf Åkesson 2005). At these sites there are many different contributions with reference to cats who have had to be put down or have been killed in accidents. The people who contribute to these guest books are for the most part those who have had similar experiences of losing their cats. The guest books thus become a form of meeting place where emotions and faith can be expressed and shared without the participants having had any previous familiarity with one another. The number of such memorial websites has increased noticeably in Sweden since 2005. During the 2000s they have also begun to appear in Norway even if not to the same extent as in Sweden. Examples of Norwegian websites are www.hakrilas.no/tilminne, www.dyresonen.no (no longer in use) and www.turtle-cats-birma.net. A corresponding German web site was named *Katzenfriedhof* (cat graveyard) (www.virtueller-tierfriedhof.de/katzen.html). It was started in 1997 and contains contributions from Germany, Switzerland and Austria. The contributions' number and length do not, however, have the same scope as their counterparts in

Sweden. Although the focus of this study has been placed on Swedish Internet websites, clearly understandable comparisons are made with Norwegian and German internet sites. This is done so that it will be possible to determine how specific the Swedish websites are.

When working as a scholar in cultural history, one cannot fail to be moved emotionally when reading all the sorrow-filled and emotionally charged contributions. The scholar's capacity for sympathy and feelings of empathy with the grief-stricken should be seen as being important for his or her ability to understand and interpret the experiences of the people who express their very genuine despair. I feel that I am aided in achieving this form for empathy by my personal interest in and love of cats that have played an important part in my life since earliest childhood. I have myself experienced considerable grief over the years at the loss of beloved cats.

1 Retrospective descriptions of the cat's life

A photo or a drawing of the deceased cat, but never its owners, is usually found in online messages. There are some examples of such a photo being replaced in Sweden by a black cross exactly like those found in some obituary notices for humans. This never occurs in Norway. A red heart is usually placed over the cat's name as a sign of the love felt for the deceased animal. There are even some isolated examples of the use of a bird, three birds on the wing or a setting sun (www.katter.nu/bortgang/katt/sidor/bortgang_katt). Such symbols have become increasingly frequent in obituary notices and gravestones for humans (see chapter 2).

The cat's name, birth year and death year are always included in the text and often the dates of its birth and death. Those who write and send greetings to the cat are not only its owners, referred to by the Swedish terms "matte" and "husse" [abbreviations for "matmor" (mistress) and "husbonde" (master)], but also the family's children, whose given names are generally listed. There are often greetings from other cats and even from the family's dogs. The home town is almost never mentioned. Nor are there photos of the people who write the contributions. From an ethical point of view, this is an advantage for the scholar when citing the contributions in that it is for the most part almost impossible to identify the writers. The disadvantage from an analytical point of view is that the district from which the contributions were made cannot be determined nor can they be linked to any exact social category.

There are many cases in Sweden, and some also in Norway, of long descriptions of the cat's entire life and what it has meant to its owners in many different situations over the years. A glorification of the cat is evident in most cases. The cat has been a psychological support for the owners. "You saw when I was sad and came and com-

forted me", noted the owner of the cat Tiger that lived between 1998 and 2002. Several of these accounts show that the cat usually lay and purred on the owner's bed, and slept with its owner. "You used to lie on my cover and purr until I fell asleep", reported the owner of the cat Martin. "Matte" wrote of her cat Lisa (1988-2001): "You lay against my hip night and day. And purred for king and country". The contributions describe such a degree of intimacy between human and cat that the cat assumes completely human characteristics. An owner described her experience with these words: **"**Your humaneness, your eyes that always met mine". The cat's personality and its communication with its owner by means of sounds and vision is often expressed. The cat Fòfoo that died in 2002 at the age of fourteen is described by its "matte" and "husse" as being "very intelligent and refined, with a slightly serious personality. He was very talkative and always looked into our eyes and at our mouths when we talked to him. He noticed everything that was new".

The cat could provide a great deal of support to mind and body. The extreme closeness between cat and owner is shown in those cases which describe it with the words "partner for life". This shows that the cat is felt to be a real member of the family. The "husse" who owned the cat Jeppe for eleven years stressed his being "my constant companion and the one who made me happy again whenever I needed comforting". These examples of web pages give an impression of the difficulty in distinguishing between a relationship to a human friend and one of having a pet, such as a cat, as an intimate friend. Anthropomorphic characteristics are clearly apparent.

A detailed description of how the cat died is commonly included in the texts published in both the Swedish and also the Norwegian material. In cases where the cat has fallen ill, its owners have been forced to make the very painful decision about having the cat put down by the veterinarian. The period of illness and the emotions this aroused are usually described. These exhaustive descriptions of the situation at the time of death undoubtedly represent a way of adjusting to sorrow by allowing the owner to express and write down what is remembered and how the event has been experienced.

As a final detail in their descriptions the owners often indicate where the cat has been buried, often quite near to the home, and that they later visit and beautify this site. The owner of the cat Gustav relates how the animal was put down by the veterinarian and then taken home and buried "in a forest grove near our house". He adds, "I usually walk there a couple of times a week. … Lay a bouquet of wild flowers on your grave". The owners can set up pictures of the dead animal in their homes and place lighted candles nearby. The owner of the two-year-old cat Elza who had to be put down in 2006 because of a tumor writes, "I have hung up a lot of nice pictures of you that I took the day before you were due to leave this life on earth".

These detailed descriptions of the circumstances relating to the death obviously constitute a way of adjusting to grief by allowing the owners to express this and to

write down their memories and their experiences of what has taken place. Such detailed descriptions in recent years, especially in Sweden, are completely on a line with the clearly increasing openness about speaking of the death of one's nearest and dearest. This has become very noticeable in the course of my fieldwork in churchyards during the 2000s (see chapter 5). The contributions on the Internet can be repeated several times and can occur several years after the actual death. A narrative tradition thus arises on the Internet. This indicates that recovering from the process of grief can take a long time, even when the death is that of well-loved pets. A contribution from the owner of the thirteen-year-old cat Snuttan that died in 2001 states, "Four years have now passed and I still miss you so terribly". The fact that narratives on the net relieve the process of grief becomes even more obvious when emotions are expressed in addition to descriptions of the events. These are usually present in descriptions of the cat's life.

2 Emotional expressions

Intense and severe emotions are usually expressed in connection with descriptions of the cat's period of illness and especially with the gruelling decision to have the veterinarian put it down. The psychological pain caused by the cat's sufferings has been very difficult to endure. Therefore, no alternative remained to putting the animal to sleep. "This was the toughest decision of our lives", wrote the signature "Your family" to the cat Baloo that died in 2002. The actual act of having the cat put down at the veterinary clinic, while it lies on "matte's" or "husse's" lap and draws its last breath, is described with deep emotion. The owner of the cat Humle that died in 2002 emphasized that the day it died "was and is the worst day of my entire life". "You stopped breathing while I sang you [a lullaby]", as the owner of the cat "Fläckiz" (1999-2001) wrote. The cat seeks bodily proximity to its owners after the lethal injection has been given, something that is often referred to with obvious grief. "You fought a long time against going to sleep. You clung to my breast with your nose against my neck until it was all over", is what the owner of the kitten Daisy wrote after it was put down in 2001. In cases of traffic accidents, remorse is expressed because the cat wandered out into the road. This is the only situation in which criticism of any kind is addressed to the deceased cat.

The process of mourning appears to be extremely painful. It contains features of *despair* and is long-lasting. The owner of the cat Knut wrote shortly after it was killed in a traffic accident, "I want to shout out to the whole world that it should just stop! The best part of my life has disappeared". The signature "Mummy and Daddy" who lost two cats in the year 2000, exclaimed: "How can we heal the wounds in our hearts?"

In her grief, the owner can also direct *accusations* towards herself and even, in some cases, towards God. When the two-month-old kitten Rasmus died in 2002, its owner Frida wrote: "How could God allow this? A tiny, innocent creature that never did any harm. Was it my fault? Could I have done anything more?" The owner of Nala (1999-2001) wondered: "Why did God have to choose you exactly?" The underlying idea is that God should have shown more solicitude towards and more protection to the animal that the owner loved so deeply. Such statements about God in relation to pets cannot be found in the Norwegian material. Here religion is kept separate from the animal's death.

A commonly expressed emotion in both Sweden and Norway is the extreme sense of *loss* experienced by the owners. In Sweden this can continue to be expressed for several years after the cat's death. "It is now 6 years since you went to Heaven, but I miss you just as much as ever", as "Matte" wrote to her cat Smulan. "Two years have passed, but my loss feels just as great", was written by the owner of the nineteen-year-old cat Maximilian that died in 2002. The sense of loss has not lessened, despite the fact that this "matte" now owns a new and much-loved cat. She continued her statement as follows: "Your place can never be filled by anyone else. It is reserved for you". Another woman expressed her despair with the words: "How will we ever manage without you?" A little girl who was ten years of age when her sixteen-year-old cat died in 1998 wrote: "I wish I could go to Heaven and bring him home again, but I can't do that".

Grief and loss are often expressed with countless tears. The owner of the cat Alice (2001-2002) emphasized: "I can cry a flood of tears, but that won't bring you back". The tears can continue for a long time. "I cry myself to sleep every night, I'm crying while I write this, I'm going to cry myself to sleep tonight and tomorrow night and the next night …", wrote the owner of the cat Sippan that died in 2002. Sara, a Norwegian cat-owner from Trondheim wrote concerning her beloved cat Tilda in 2007: "… difficult to imagine that I will ever stop crying".

Reminiscence is highly present among both Swedish and Norwegian owners even if the cat has been lost as a physical presence. "I will never forget you! You will always be in my heart!", one owner wrote after her five-month-old kitten died in 2001. At times, the memory is expressed as being "eternal", which is to say never-ending. The memory can live on over time through a photograph hung on the wall. The owner of the cats Nicke and Lina that died in 1998 and 2001, respectively, wrote: "Will never forget the two of you, see your photographs on my wall every day and feel that you are here with me". The customary lighting of a candle also contributes to keeping the memory fresh. "We light a candle in your memory every evening", was emphasized by the owners of the one-year-old cat Sheila that died in 2003.

Love for the dead cat is expressed in many and deep-felt ways in the textual messages. The owner of the cat Tarzan (1986-1996) wrote soon after its death that "I

loved and will love you more than life itself". Nearness to the deceased animal is also shown by being associated with the owner's own heart. Here it would appear that there is no obvious difference between humans and animals, but that this difference has been obliterated on the level of experience. The "matte" of the six-year-old cat Claudius that was killed in an accident in 2005 writes, "It feels as if I have buried my heart, because that's just what you were".

Even when grief and the sense of loss are great, there are also expressions of *gratitude* for the period of time which the owners have enjoyed with the dead cat. "I am so happy that I was able to share my life with you", as the owner of the eight-year-old cat Simon wrote after its death in 2001. The "matte" of the cat Lina (1985-1997) expressed her "thanks for the years you looked after me". This feeling of the cat taking care of its "matte" and "husse" instead of the opposite is something that is often expressed. In some cases the owners express their gratitude for having had the loan of the cat as long as it lived. "Matte" Susanne wrote a poem about her cat Kesella (2005-2006) in which she says, "An angel that spread light in my life was loaned to me. … I had the loan of an angel, for a while". Here a supernatural dimension is present by depiction in the form of an angel. Not only humans can be regarded as angels but also pets. The angel status can sometimes begin already in the life time but manifests iself especially after death. The belief is very similar concerning dead humans and pets.

There are some instances of *poems* being written to the cat. These can be reminiscent of those that are found in obituary notices of human deaths. Reflections on parting, loss and memory are included. The following poem in memory of the thirteen-year-old cat Lillis that died in 1999 was written several years later:

> An autumn wind blew softly
> And gently brushed your tired cheek
> Just as a candle is blown out
> Your days of life were ended

An even stronger resemblance to a human obituary notice is the verse that was dedicated to the cat Isabel (2002-2003):

> You fell asleep while the spring wind sighed
> now illness will no longer bring you pain.
> Sweet is the sleep in the silent grave,
> Good to know that you no longer suffer.
> Death came so slowly, just like a friend.
> Took your paw and guided you home!

The word "hand" used in human obituary notices has been exchanged in the last line of the above poem with "paw". The rest of the text is identical to that used in announcements of human deaths. Use of a poem of this kind shows that the distinction between humans and pets is tangibly lessened in cat owners' consciousness. When the fifteen-year-old cat Blixen died in 2001, it was commemorated by its "matte" with an especially long poem consisting of eight verses with five lines each. This indicates an intense closeness to the cat. The verse "A tiny angel to us came, smiled at us and left again" is found in many obituary notices and memorial sites for infants. It is also used in the memorial verses dedicated to the four-year-old cat Sascha in 2003.

While a Christian message occasionally appears in obituary notices for humans, this is more rare in the Internet forums established for deceased cats. It can be found, however, such as when the following verse by the hymn writer Britt G. Hallqvist is cited in memory of the one-year-old cat Lisen Forget-me-not that died in 2005. One of the verses can be translated thus:

In heavenly halls
With walls of blue
Our Father and babies
Play peek-a-boo.

The memory of the two-year-old cat named Mowitz that died in 2005 was observed by the citing of the verse from Psalms 23: "The Lord is my Shepherd …" In Sweden, in other words, no general inconsistency is felt between having a Christian faith and practicing those forms for anthropomorphism with regard to a deceased cat that have become noticeable in internet messages.

Generally speaking, it would appear that pets are clearly integrated members of the families of those persons who choose to publish a message on the Internet. This applies to those who have the greatest need for expressing their grief and for sharing it with others. Grief and its accompanying emotions concerning the deceased pet have been provided with an opportunity for expression in a public sphere by using the Internet. In a developing modern social climate no need is felt for concealing grief from others' observation. It may even be less painful to write down one's experiences than to express them among one's nearest and dearest. The discussion forums on the Internet can in this way be of genuine assistance for surviving a lengthy process of mourning and for sharing it with others. In the midst of a difficult situation of grief, it may be of great help to realize that other persons can publish contributions that will offer consolation and in which they can share their own previous experiences of endured grief. Traumatic emotions can be relieved when they surface through weeping or by written messages instead of being concealed in secrecy. Answers may be re-

ceived that can aid in a release of feelings in the grief-stricken situation. In November 2007 the signature "Tazchaos" wrote to a cat owner who had lost a cat: "I think you should have a good cry if that's what you want and feel for. I cried for several days after my own dear cat died. But things did get better afterwards. Of course, I know that my cat will never come back, but after having lived through that stage, I could think about her and talk about her without having my tears start to flow again. Instead I began to smile every time I remembered her. You were lucky that your cat lived so long! Just try thinking as positively as you can!" (www.flashback.info).

The German web site 'Katzenfriedhof' contains far shorter contributions than its Swedish counterpart and there is much less expression of any deeply felt sentiment. The Norwegian statements are similar to the German ones in this respect and thus differ from the Swedish. Remembrance, gratitude, love and loss are what receive especial mention in the Norwegian and German statements. The noticeably advanced reduction of the borderline between human and pet that has become evident in Sweden does not appear in the same obvious manner in the comparable German and Norwegian material. This difference can be ascertained, but is difficult to explain in any general way. Openness is more explicitly shown in Sweden with regard to deep sentiments relating to pets. This obviously satisfies a widespread need that has grown up. The fact that one can be anonymous when writing a contribution certainly makes it easier to express one's innermost feelings about a fairly privatized area relating to death and grief, especially when this concerns pets.

3 Conceptions of a reunion in a future existence

An often recurring motif in Swedish statements is the concept of a reunion or a meeting with the cat in a future transcendent existence. An expression that is often met with concerns a feline heaven. "Today our beloved Prins passed on to the lovely heaven for animals", was one text published in 2004. There the deceased cat will not only be reunited with its owners sometime in the future, but it will also quickly meet other cats, among them those that have died earlier and that the cat knew during its earthly life. As the owner of the cat Lotus wrote: "Now you are together with 17-year-old Svante, running about in green fields and chasing butterflies". "Now he's probably roaming about in cat heaven and has again become young and strong", was emphasized by the owner of another cat, Lotus (1988-2003). The cat is thus believed to have acquired a new life in this feline heaven that has a strong resemblance to its former conditions of life on earth. Earthly life is in this way projected onto an assumed existence after death. The assurance about a new existence in heaven can be clearly expressed without involving any form of doubt. "Matte" Vendela wrote to her cat Tigger:

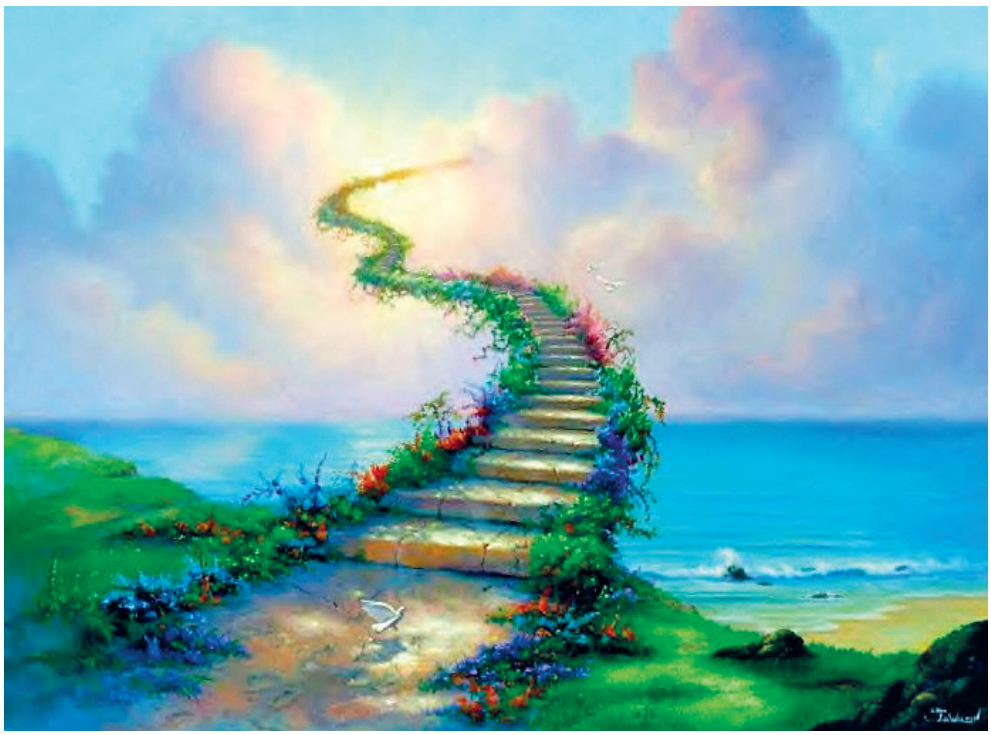
"Some people say we don't go to heaven when we die, but you can be certain that you will. Because your heart is made of pure and solid gold".

One expression that is used in some cases is that the deceased cat has passed on over the so-called "rainbow bridge" to another world, called the "Rainbow Country", where there are only positive properties. This world is described in detail in a poem by the author Paul C. Dahm and is cited in some of the Internet contributions. The following phases are some of those found in this poem: "Here there are grassy fields and hillocks for all our special friends where they can run and play together. Here there is plenty of food, water and sunshine, and our friends can keep nice and warm". The Internet site www.regnbagsbron.org/ has the sub-title "Memorial site for beloved pets". In some cases a rainbow is depicted in the Internet contributions as well as a "rainbow bridge" that winds up towards the clouds.

Sometimes the deceased cat is described as having come to Nangijala, a name for the realm of death found in Astrid Lindgren's book *The Brothers Lionheart* (www.ne.se Nangijala). This is something quite different from the various and far more common conceptions about a cat heaven. In some case, dead humans are also believed to come to Nangijala (see chapter 8).

Belief in a future reunion between the cat and its owners on the far side of death can often be expressed. The text written in memory of the not quite one-year-old cat Lillan that died in 2002 stated, "We'll meet again soon, my dearest friend". A more uncertain or diffuse expression is, "Perhaps we'll meet again". A future meeting can in other cases be expressed as being very specific: "Husse and matte hope we will meet you again on the other side. We hope you will greet us at the door when it is our turn to go through the pearly gates". These words were written to the cat Emil that lived between 1996 and 2002. After this kind of future meeting, no painful parting would ever occur**.** Mourners can undoubtedly find an obvious solace in a conception of this kind. The following was written by "Matte" to her few-month-old kitten "Rasmus" that died in the year 2000: "I know we'll meet again after a very long time. … Then we will always belong together. And when that day comes, nothing will ever part us again".

A belief of this kind can be linked to a Christian belief in some cases and not merely to a diffuse and general religiousness "lacking an express association to any institutionalized religion" (Dahlgren 2000:66). When the cat Cleopatra died in the year 2000, her "matte" wrote: " The one beloved of God is soon taken. … Wait for me up there in Heaven, I'll be coming later!" The owner of the five-year-old cat Day Tripper that died in 2006 writes: "Now you are resting safely with the God I believe in". A prayer addressed to God can express the hope that a message will be passed on to the dead cat: "Please, God, tell him that I love him more than anything else", as was emphasized by the owner of Fläckiz (1999-2001).



1 A picture of the rainbow bridge. (www.acreswaycats.com/rainbowbridge.htm).

2 The grave of a cat at the animal graveyard in Trollhättan decorated with a china cat figurine. Four figurines of angels and one of a Christmas elf were placed on the evergreen boughs and the wreath. Photographed in March 2007 by Johan Gustavsson.

3 On the second anniversary of our beloved Micki. I miss you. An angel holds the candle with the picture of the black cat. (www.virtueller-tierfriedhof.de/katzen.html).

There are also some instances in Sweden, as well as some few in Norway, of a cat being ascribed an *angelic character*. This shows an obvious similarity to that which has become usual on memorial sites dedicated to humans (see chapter 8). A commentary about the cat Nosen describes it as "beloved Angel-cat". The cat Mitzi is characterized as being "an angel in cat heaven". "Heaven needed a little cat-angel", was what the owner of the cat Baloo wrote after it died in 2002. The two Norwegian examples of the use of "angel" do not mention a possible future existence in Heaven. Such expressions of faith are reserved solely for deceased persons in Norway, in keeping with the older Christian tradition that has not felt the influence of neo-religious modes of thought in recent years. During my fieldwork at an animal cemetery in Trollhättan in March 2007, I observed that a number of china figurines of angels had been placed on graves. The total number was higher than it had been during my previous period of fieldwork at the same graveyard in the summer of 2005. The idea that the cat now has a new existence in angelic form, which is a clearly positive idea, contributes to relieving the grief felt by the surviving humans and a lessening of the feelings of loss. The angel in its capacity as an exalted spiritual being is conceived of as being able to have contact with people living on earth.

Other angels in heaven can express joy because the dead cat now enjoys a new existence. The owner of the cat Sheeba that died in 1997 believed she could hear "the angels call out your name, even I can hear them deep down in my heart. They sing and are happy". Sometimes heavenly angels are considered to have come and fetched the cat. The owner of the sixteen-year-old cat Stålis that died in 2001 wrote, "When that day came, filled with sorrow because you could not take any more, then the angels came and carried you off to the cats' paradise". God Himself can also be thought to have intervened. "God probably needed another cat angel in the cat heaven", as the owners of the kitten Azlan wrote when it suddenly died in 2006.

In this regard, a clearly religious element has appeared in recent years, something that reminds one of the manifestations of angels related to neo-religious conceptions that have been linked to recent deaths of younger persons in Sweden and to some extent in Norway (see chapter 8).

There are examples of the dead cat being called ”mein Engelchen”, or my little angel, on the German Internet site Katzenfriedhof. This points to a conception of an existence after death. There are even some instances about “cat angels” being seen as taking care of and protecting the deceased pet. These are the angels that have taken the cat with them. In this can be found similarities to the conceptions that are common in Sweden. Evidence has also recently been found in Sweden, but not in Norway, that grief-stricken owners *have conducted conversations with their dead cats* on the Internet in the hope that the cats will be able to hear the communications, even when some uncertainty is also expressed concerning this matter. The cat Isa that died at age fifteen in 2001 received the following message from her “matte”: “I want you to know that I keep a picture of you on my bedside table and that I chat with you every evening and say good night, have you heard me?” In some cases, a letter has followed the cat into its grave. “In my sorrow and loss I wrote a letter to you that was placed in your grave and followed you up to Heaven”, wrote the owner of the cat Sheeba that died in 1997. A clearly expressed Christian faith can be conveyed in some cases. After the three-year-old cat Zhiney died in 2002, its owner prayed, “May God bless her. Heavenly Peace”. A prayer to God can concern the passing on of a message to the dead cat: “Tell him, God, that I love him most of all”, was emphasized by the owner of the cat Fläckiz (1999-2001). In some few cases, a written message has been placed on the cat’s grave. Personally formulated and handwritten texts have also been addressed to and placed on the graves of deceased humans. This applies to children and young people and, sometimes, to middle-aged persons (see chapter 2). In this respect also, the distinction between deceased animals and humans is seen to have lessened or disappeared in Sweden, while continuing to exist in Norway.

Online statements in Sweden indicate the importance of the cat not forgetting its earthly owners after entering into its new existence. When the three-year-old cat Elof died in 2003, its “matte” wrote, in English, “Don’t give up on me yet, Don’t forget who I am”. The text continued in Swedish with the words, “Wait for me. … I’m coming”. It should be noted that people whose mother tongue is Swedish sometimes use English when expressing themselves. Another question that is sometimes asked is if the deceased cat misses its owners. The owner of the cat Rasmus that died in the year 2000 asked, “Do you miss us? … Maybe we no longer live on in your memory. Or maybe we still do?” A sense of loss and need for remembrance are thus considered to be reciprocal wants for the deceased cat and its owner. “Lillmatte”, the girl Fia, wrote to the fifteen-year-old cat Gosan that died in 2005, “I hope you watch over me,

kitty dear, and that you will welcome me when my time has come". Various forms for this type of contemplated heavenly guardianship can also be found on memorial sites for deceased humans (see chapter 8). A difference is not evident.

A belief of this kind about deceased cats living on after death, experiencing continued contact with the surviving owners and meeting them again after they themselves die, seems to be a new phenomenon that has manifested itself on the Internet. At graves for cats in animal cemeteries, with some few exceptions, I have not observed expressions for any comparable conception. One gravestone at Lilla Edet for the cat Jocke that lived between 1973 and 1983 has the text: "You were our joy. We shall meet again. The Bergevärn family". A gravestone at Trollhättan bears this text: "Farewell beloved friends until we are reunited in eternity". This almost total absence of pronounced conceptions of faith can be linked to the fact that both Swedish animal cemeteries and their counterparts on the European continent advise against expressions of a religious character. This is done in order to maintain a distinction between humans and animals (see chapter 6). A similar curtailment is not found on the Internet, thus allowing pet owners to express themselves about their religious conceptions more freely.

Norwegian Internet sites also contain some examples concerning a fairly diffuse existence after death for deceased cats, but far from as many as in Sweden. The fixing of the boundary between human and animal as spiritual beings is, in other words, far more pronounced there than in Sweden. Norwegian contributions can sometimes indicate a direct criticism towards "humanlike characterization". The signature Skaffer Stjerna ("Get the stars") wrote on 25 February 2005 that "animals should be treated like animals". The concept of a "rainbow bridge" does, however, occasionally surface in Norway.

The German Internet site Katzenfriedhof also can exhibit some instances of diffuse ideas concerning reunion and a conception of a cat heaven even if these are clearly less widespread than in Sweden. The conception of pets crossing over a "rainbow bridge" and coming to "the land of the rainbow" also occur in some cases. The following text was written in memory of the one-year-old cat Spike that died in 2006: "Doch irgendwann sehen wir uns wieder. Ich freue mich jetzt schon, dich wieder zu sehen" (Sometime we will meet again. I am already looking forward to seeing you once again).

Concluding remarks

This chapter has demonstrated by reference to actual examples of Internet contributions on sites devoted to pet cats, the emotional proximity between humans and pets

as this is expressed in connection with the death of these pets. Longer and more sentimental contributions are found in Sweden compared to the discussion forums that I have studied in Norway and in German-speaking areas.

The written messages on the Internet become a way of coping with grief and the sense of loss that can persist for several years. Such expressions of grief in Sweden have begun to assume forms that increasingly resemble the texts that are used when humans die. Even religious expressions and beliefs in an animal existence after death have manifested themselves on the Internet. This indicates that boundaries between humans and pets are in the process of being wiped out. This demonstrates an obvious difference compared to previously maintained distinctions that held animals outside the spiritual and religious sphere. It is now actually possible to discern a movement proceeding in the opposite direction to the process of secularization in relation to religion among human beings as this is expressed in obituary notices and on gravestones.

One limitation in the study of these memorial sites is that it is, for the most part, impossible to obtain information about the writers' home districts, their social surroundings or their ages. It is therefore not possible to classify the material with a basis in the traditional ethnological categories of space, time and social group. Focus is instead placed on the relationship to the deceased pet and the consequently associated emotions and conceptions of faith. This has thus become a study of contemporary popular beliefs and their narrative expressions.

Even if the reader of these messages cannot learn much about the writers' external circumstances, he or she receives all the more insights into their personal experiences. One receives considerably more tangible information about the deceased cats than about the humans who have written the contributions. This relates to the course of the cats' lives, their personalities, age, sex and the circumstances of their deaths. In addition one gains insight into the humans' belief in a continued existence after death. Here the owners believe that they will be able to continue to maintain contact with their deceased pets as long as they themselves live and, indeed, also after they themselves have died.

The Internet contributions studied here provide opportunities for establishing a number of fundamental ideas about contemporary humans. It is obvious that intense emotions need to find expression in words and not be suppressed within the systems and thoughts of the separate individuals. A process of grief must be allowed to be shared with others even if this is not done verbally within one's immediate circle of friends and relatives. It is not unproblematic to converse with just anyone at all about one's innermost feelings and traumatic experiences. Here the Internet can serve as a public sphere providing welcome relief when struggling to endure the difficulties of a process of grief. Mourners can sit at their PCs in the privacy of their homes and ex-

press their innermost feelings and beliefs, and communicate these to a large number of mostly unknown people. The writers do not need to meet them physically, but can still receive responses and sympathy from others who have lived through similar difficult experiences. This contact with the outer world is established without any threats to personal integrity. The mourner can be very unguarded and still maintain anonymity. That is probably the reason why the writers do not give their names or, at the very least, their home districts. The words "matte" and "husse" serve as excellent substitutions for the owners' names. The private sphere maintains its integrity despite the written messages being aimed outwards towards a wide audience. Anonymity and collective accessibility can, in other words, exist side by side. This constitutes a difference compared to the memorial sites devoted to humans in which the deceased's name and year of birth and of death are stated. Despite the fact that anonymity is thus set aside, the mourners express themselves very openly. It may be easier to show openness due to grief for a close relative or friend than for a pet. Showing grief for this latter death may perhaps be considered as less acceptable in a social context.

Swedish texts on the Internet consist of longer and more emotional messages than those on the German discussion forum that I studied and those I discovered in Norway. Conceptions of a feline heaven and angelic forms after death are found to a certain extent in Germany, but their focal point is in Sweden. This constitutes a manifest difference when compared to Norway. There the spiritual dimension in the form of pictorial symbols and texts is much more pronounced on human graves than in Sweden (see chapter 2). The situation between these two countries is entirely reversed regarding animal graves or animal memorial web sites. The spiritual dimension after death is actually much more pronounced in Sweden with reference to animals than to humans. This must in its turn be regarded as an expression of a more obvious secularization in Sweden than in Norway. Openness as regards death and the concept that one can converse with the deceased animal clearly appears to be on the increase in Sweden. An increase of individualism is obviously in force in this regard. This is something that I have been able to observe in recent years when it comes to attitudes towards people who have suddenly died as a result of accidents, murder or manslaughter. This has to do with written texts at the scene of the death and also with texts published on the Internet, and, in later years, is true not only of Sweden but also of Norway (see chapter 7). As a main result of this chapter I have found that the previously strict boundaries between humans and pets are increasingly in a state of flux especially in Sweden.

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Reviews of studies on death and dying

Experienced grief in northern Sweden

Britta Lundgren, Oväntad död – förväntad sorg. En etnologisk studie av sörjandets processer. Carlsson Bokförlag, Stockholm 2006. 178 pp. ISBN 91-7203-783-0.

Britta Lundgren at the University of Umeå has written an interesting book about experiences of grief and about how close relatives cope in the present day with the process of mourning brought about by an unexpected death due to an accident. The book is included in a research project at Umeå entitled "A reconsideration of confidence. Survival after violence, sickness and accident".

The author's source material consists for the most part of in-depth interviews of eight bereaved women some time after their sudden loss of a husband or child. A few short telephone interviews are also included. All these interviews have the moment of the accident as their starting point, and have been anonymized by the use of fictitious names. The informants themselves took contact with the author after having seen newspaper articles and the posters she had put up. No men took contact and the book therefore contains no interviews with men. The author might well have profited by discussing what this can signify for the results of the study.

The author uses the sociologist Zygmunt Baumann's analyses of death and immortality in modern society as the point of departure for her theoretical reasoning. She also utilizes other sociological and psychological research literature.

Lundgren gives an account of the various interviews as study-examples of different situations. The first example deals with a twenty-nine-year-old woman known by the fictitious name of Lena. She was left with two small children after her husband was killed in a traffic accident. She was interviewed on two separate occasions. The conversations were marked by obvious feelings of unreality, meaninglessness, outrage and anger. Socially speaking, this woman had, as had many others, been placed outside her previous social circle. She had also found contacts with different authorities, such as insurance companies and banks, to be frustrating. She appealed for more empathy and helpfulness from her surroundings in this extremely vulnerable situation. In the privacy of her own home, she often talked with her children about their father so that they would not forget him.

Two of the other women had suffered the sudden loss of a child. These mothers meant that it was important that the deceased children would not be forgotten by their relatives and friends. They experienced frustration, therefore, when no one would talk about them. One of the mothers criticized the callousness she experienced in connection with the traffic accident on the part of a doctor, the psychologist she consulted and even the firm of undertakers. The mother who had an active faith in God and in the life everlasting seemed to have coped with her grief better than those who lacked such faith. She stated during the interview that "I have children on both sides". With this, she was referring to her belief that her daughter has lived on after death and can therefore later be reunited with her relatives.

A special chapter of the book concerns the reaction of family members at the death of a spouse whose children are grown up. The author has interviewed a woman and her adult daughter; the daughter made notes in her diary during the period of time immediately following the accident. New, informal and richly varied rituals have come to gain importance in such families, such as, for example, the question of how the cremation urn is to be dealt with before it is buried. This particular family carried the urn with them around the neighbourhood and their country cottage.

One chapter deals with mourning as being the closure of a relationship, in that the mourner must break the ties back to what has been in order to continue on with life. Before mourning can be concluded, however, it must first be experienced. While grief is an emotional reaction to a loss, mourning is an operational activity through which one expresses one's grief. This can bring about a breaking of the ties to the deceased and, in this way, a return to new normality. In cases where mourning continues unceasingly, however, it is considered to be abnormal and pathological. Mourners can be assisted in more easily concluding their grief by contacting societal support authorities, such as the church mourning groups exemplified by the author. Here mourners can meet with others who have been and are in the same situation, and speak of their loss and grief. This can contribute to feelings of fellowship instead of the loneliness and isolation which can otherwise easily develop and get out of control. None of the author's informants had, however, participated in any mourning groups. She thus unfortunately has no individualized evidence as to what participation in such groups could have meant to any of these persons. The author builds her presentation instead on interviews with a deaconess who has led such groups and on literature constituting instruction for mourning groups. The mourners in this study have, however, read such literature on their own, but the author has not discussed with them what these books have meant in their processes of mourning.

Mourning does not only lead to a severance of ties back in time, but also to gaining a new and different relationship to the deceased. This can take the form of, for example, keeping the memory of the deceased alive in a natural manner by means of

spoken conversation. A collective memory is thus created that survives the individual life. In such instances, support groups and instructive literature can once again be of help. Biological death does not necessarily lead to a social death; this can instead be postponed for a long period of time. Here the author bases her analysis on the approaches utilized by the sociologists Zygmunt Bauman and Tony Walter. In Baumann's terminology, one can then indicate the rise of collective immortality activities. Websites for grief and mourning on the Internet can be of use in this respect. The author has studied the Internet network *Vimil*, which is a discussion forum for people who fit the category "We who have lost someone in the middle of our lives", with the address www.vimil.nu.

The book's strength lies in the author's conversations with the mourning women. She has obviously been very successful in establishing contacts despite the highly emotional situations that are the starting point for the book. The conversations that the author has held with the interviewed women have undoubtedly filled a therapeutic function for them, even if the author does not discuss this point. From a research-ethical point of view, it is important that interview conversations can have a positive benefit not only for the researcher, but also for the informants who find themselves in a critical situation and for whom the topic is emotionally charged. Such research-ethical viewpoints might well have been emphasized in the book. The author contents herself with noting that some of her informants wept during the interviews or were in a very upset frame of mind.

I would also like to have seen some discussion of the new, present-day rituals about which a great deal of newer literature can be found in Scandinavian cultural science. The author has for the most part conducted the analyses in her book by referring to international research literature in psychology and sociology, whereas references to cultural science are clearly underrepresented.

Despite these criticisms, I would recommend the book to all those working in the cultural sciences, and in other disciplines, who wish to acquaint themselves with how modern processes of grief and mourning for close relatives are expressed and coped with by women in extremely difficult situations of crisis.

Homosexuality, AIDS and funerals in Sweden

Ingeborg Svensson: Liket i garderoben. En studie av sexualitet, livsstil och begravning. Stockholm, Normal förlag 2007. 263 pp. Diss.

Ingeborg Svensson has presented her doctoral dissertation in ethnology at the University of Stockholm. Its subject is an in-depth study of the funerals of younger or

middle-aged homosexual men in Sweden who, for the most part, died of AIDS from the early 1980s and on. These deaths occurred before the mid-1990s when antiretroviral drugs began to be effective. 651 of the approximately 800 HIV-positive men who have died thus far in Sweden died before 1996. It is this pre-1996 period that is the focal point of the dissertation. The issues she discusses take their point of departure in the comprehensive norms and evaluations that are expressed in the men's funerals, many of which have taken place under the auspices of the church.

The dissertation is based on extensive fieldwork that includes both lengthier and shorter interviews conducted by the author in, especially, Stockholm, Gothenburg and Malmö, as well as also a lesser number of observations of funerals in these same cities. Her interviews have been made partly with HIV-positive men and their relatives, and partly with the professionals who have performed duties in connection with funerals. These include clergymen, social workers, psychologists and funeral directors. Investigated printed sources consist of obituary notices, funeral programmes, and clergymen's funeral orations. The author has also studied the homosexual magazine *Reporter* and the newsletter *Kom ut*, published by the National association for sexual equality. In addition, she has used material issued by the foundation Noah's Ark – Red Cross whose purpose is to support people affected by AIDS. The author has also been provided with photographs of funerals and a few video recordings. She has not, however, taken photographs at any of the funerals she has studied. Nor does she discuss why she does not use any of this pictorial material in her dissertation. In my opinion, such material would have provided an additional dimension, namely the visual, to her presentation.

An emancipatory perspective is apparent in the dissertation, and an emancipatory attitude is obviously one in which the author concurs. She describes herself as being lesbian and as siding with the men whom she has studied. She supports the homosexual movement's struggle against heterosexual judgementation in society at large. The scholar's point of departure is, in other words, clearly subjective in relation to the subject under study. The fact that the author's standpoints are so clearly expressed is actually of great benefit. It furthers a necessary clarification of the author's commitment not only to the scientific structure of the account, but also to the criticism of society that makes itself felt in the dissertation.

The homosexual movement has long stressed the importance of homosexuals coming out of the closet and becoming visible instead of remaining secreted. This has led the author to entitle her dissertation *Liket i garderoben* (The corpse in the closet). How can efforts for openness be ascertained at the funerals of homosexual men? One must study both the aesthetic form in the choice of colours and music, and the verbal form in the eulogies that are presented. An important perspective in the dissertation is that of 'we and them', in which questions as to whether the deceased's

biological family or his surviving partner may be termed relatives are of vital importance. Using her study, the author wishes to demonstrate the importance of sexuality in connection with death and funerals. This has not been deemed a consideration in previous cultural historical research on death and funerals, this last designated internationally as *thanatology.*

Theoretically speaking, this dissertation takes its inspiration from studies of ritual and performance, among these Victor Turner's reflections on liminal phases and the so-called arenas where such dramas take place. The author might also have received beneficial impulses from cultural scientific research on ritual, not the least of which is the anthology *Ritualer. Kulturhistoriske studier* (Rituals. Cultural historical studies), edited by Arne Bugge Amundsen et.al., and published in Oslo in 2006.

When the AIDS epidemic started in Sweden in the 1980s, the supposed risk of infection led to the dead men's bodies being carefully wrapped in black plastic bags by hospital personnel wearing protective clothing. Funeral parlour personnel also had to observe scrupulous precautions. Medical considerations subjected these dead men to total isolation at hospitals. This despite the fact that in 1979 state authorities had ceased to classify homosexuality as a disease. The most extreme change occurred in the 1980s with the outbreak of the AIDS epidemic. In place of the de-pathologizing that had taken place in 1979, an intense pathophobia now arose in the public sphere in the form of newspaper placards and articles. The author describes the media situation as demonstrating 'moral panic' and 'blatant homophobia'. Homosexual culture now became strictly controlled because the illness was thought to be contagious. In 1987, the Swedish parliament passed a law closing sauna clubs on the pretext that these settings promoted promiscuous homosexual sexuality. The author describes the 1980s as being a period of secrecy and invisibility for homosexuals. They were engulfed in a morass of imagination filled with concepts of shame, punishment and death.

It was in this precise socio-cultural context that their funerals took place. It is self-evident that confrontations would arise with the deceased's biological family, in most cases his parents. His male partner, with whom he had lived but who never had been accepted by the family, was not allowed to participate in the preparations for the funeral or be named in the obituary notice. The concept of 'son' or, in other words, biological affinity, was what was most important for the parents. He was also to be buried in his boyhood home town and not in the large city where he had since resided. Homosexuality was thus perceived as being the opposite of family. Legislature relating to homosexual cohabitation was first passed in 1987, and laws on registered partnership, which gave the partner a position in the rules of inheritance, in 1994. One method used by the partner to counteract being ignored was to place a separate obituary notice in the newspapers. The author has made a detailed analysis of such conflicting notices concerning one and the same person. In a conflict of this uncom-

promizing nature, the basic question becomes just who can be described as the next of kin. It is obvious from the author's text that she takes the part of the male partner/cohabitant and wishes not only to safeguard his prospects and rights, but also to counteract discrimination, anonymization and secrecy on the part of the surrounding heterosexual community with regard to homosexual individuals. In order to have her project approved, however, she was compelled by the ethical committee of the Swedish research board to anonymize the persons studied. She regrets this. She writes, 'The dilemma lies quite simply in any anonymization being felt to be just as great an affront towards the openly homosexual and/or HIV-positive as non-anonymization can be for relatives having a different opinion' (p. 117). She has actually chosen to ignore the research board's ethical instructions and to allow some of the persons studied be recognizable by appearing under their own names.

In a chapter that the author terms 'Life-centred funerals', she describes farewell ceremonies in which the deceased's life has been centred upon, and in which HIV/AIDS and homosexuality are clearly expressed instead of being withheld and suppressed. The ailing person has in some cases participated in the planning of the funeral rites. The colours chosen can be pink and lilac, which have been symbolic colours for the homosexual movement since the 1970s. The choice of music is also linked to this movement, for example by the use of the song 'Europa', written by the homo-activist Jan Hammarlund. The mood is planned to be one of festivity and joy, rather than grief or shame. An expression of Gay Pride is considered by the author to be a strategy of self-respect. Even the choice of Christian texts used in church funerals can sometimes be influenced by the fact that the deceased was homosexual and had died of HIV/AIDS. Some clergymen, some of whom declare that they, too, are homosexuals or lesbians, respectively, have referred to the deceased's actual life situation in their funeral orations. One recurrent motif is that of love expressed in the biblical texts that otherwise are employed in heterosexual marriage ceremonies. These references to love contribute to giving the same status to homosexual men as that which is applicable within the heterosexual norm. The author speaks in this context of a strategy of normalization. This implies that the homosexual's life has not been reprehensible in terms of guilt and shame but has instead had a value of its own. Funerals can in this way contribute to giving these men posthumous redress, something that is of prime importance to the author.

In closing, let me point out that this dissertation has provided interesting insights into homosexuals' way of life, and how it has been seen to exist in a position that is problematical with regard to the surrounding heterosexual community. At the same time, this way of life has been altered in both a positive and a negative way, positively because of successively more liberal legislation, and negatively because of the AIDS epidemic that broke out in the early 1980s.

Nursing care in the presence of death in Sweden

Eva M. Karlsson: Livet nära döden. Situationer, status och social solidaritet vid vård i livets slutskede. Mångkulturellt centrum. Tumba 2008. 268 pp. Diss.

Eva M. Karlsson has presented a doctoral dissertation in ethnology at the University of Stockholm. In her dissertation, she focuses on a description and analysis of the public nursing care provided to patients in their own homes who have been diagnosed as suffering from terminal cancer. Such activity is termed "Palliative home nursing in the final stages of life", and "Life near death" has therefore been chosen as an appropriate main title of the dissertation. The book has been published by the Mångkulturellt centrum in Botkyrka, Sweden, the author's place of employment.

This palliative form of nursing first began being applied in Sweden in the 1980s and in England as early as the 1960s. It consists of a close cooperation between nursing personnel and patients with their closest relatives. The aim of such nursing is to alleviate the symptoms of the illness, thus increasing the quality of life for extremely ill patients so that they are able to experience as lenient a death as is possible. The nursing personnel are to concern themselves with the needs of the total person and not merely monitor and deal with his or her medical needs. The patient's social, psychological and existential condition must also be taken into consideration. This is what constitutes the greatest difference from the acute healthcare given in hospitals. Despite these clearly expressed ideological intentions, nursing personnel often feel that they give most attention to the patients' physical condition. It is that which is most obviously apparent when observed in the context of their specialized skills and is thus easiest to deal with. Information as to the disease's degree of difficulty and the fact that no hope of recovery remains must always be readily available to both patients and their relatives. Their participation in this form of nursing care constitutes a mainstay in its philosophy. Such participation is to be expressed in the care recipients' experience of the care providers' attention to them and their comments, and by the providers' consideration of their expressed wishes. Interviews that the author has conducted with patients show that their experience of such consideration has been positive.

The dissertation is based on Karlsson's own fieldwork at selected palliative units in or near large Swedish cities. This fieldwork has been conducted in the form of observations both during meetings of nursing personnel, who were primarily trained nurses, and during their visits in the homes. In addition, the author has conducted interviews with persons from all the categories involved, namely 22 interviews with nurses, 12 with patients and three with relatives. Except for three instances, these interviews have all been conducted with the help of a tape-recorder. Surprisingly few people declined to be interviewed despite the fact that the topic concerned is ex-

ceedingly sensitive. The author discloses that she met outspokenness in conversations about death. This is in contrast to results shown in previous research during the 1900s which indicated a tabooing against speaking about death. The pendulum has obviously swung towards greater openness in recent years, something that I have also been able to observe in my own research.

A scrupulous anonymization has been carried out concerning the assembled material. This has also been done with the names of the palliative units in which the study has been conducted. The dissertation has a clearly empirical foundation on the whole, while the presentation is characterized by what the anthropologist Clifford Geertz expressed as being "thick description". The reader feels a positive nearness to both nursing personnel and patients who receive nursing services. It is easy to imagine being involved in and affected by this tragic situation.

Palliative home-nursing involves both younger and older people. It does not last for a very lengthy period of time in the individual cases since the illness has reached an extremely advanced stage when the patient is provided with this form of nursing. After death has occurred, nursing personnel meet together in order to speak about what has happened and are thus aided in the closure of the process of mourning. This actually becomes a personal matter for the personnel because contacts with the patient have been so frequent and so deeply personal both in the duration of treatment and during conversations.

The daily performance of nursing care is the centre of attention in this dissertation. The author analyses the interaction of the nursing personnel, the patients and the closest relatives with one another both in those cases in which good contact is maintained and those in which difficulties occur and communication lessens. These encounters between individuals and actors are given the term *situations* by the author, thus referring to the terminology used by the sociologists Erving Goffman and Randar Collins. Nursing personnel speak of both "good" and "difficult" patients with regard to cooperative willingness during treatment visits and trustworthiness in the intervals between visits. Those who are categorized as being "difficult" were those with whom the nursing personnel experienced as having had poor contact, leading to a feeling of having lost some of the control over the situations. This seems especially to have been the case with male patients and to have been reinforced by the fact that the nursing personnel consisted for the most part of women. Female patients were often experienced as being more compliant. Male patients could thus be seen as a somewhat bothersome element in the cultural contacts in early phases of the nursing care. Gender divergence disappears in a later phase when the patients have become increasingly enfeebled. Then a dehumanization process occurs instead, and the patient goes from functioning as something like an active subject to becoming a passive object, not only for nursing personnel but also in relation to the relatives.

The concept of the good home occupies a prominent position in the ideology of palliative nursing. This is the motivation for having nursing care take place in the patient's home with its expectations of providing security and warmth in the final stages of life. The public and the private sphere then meet on the latter's home ground. This can be an obvious advantage for the patients as the course of their serious illness leads to their becoming more weakened. The meetings in the home counteract the possibility of the patient becoming a mere object for the nursing personnel, but instead allow him or her some semblance of functioning as a subject. The choice of nursing in the home is, however, coupled to a nursing-care ideology rather than to the patients and their relatives. A doctor writes a letter of referral concerning palliative nursing care without the patient's own preferences necessarily having been considered.

In a social context, Karlsson has taken both ethnicity and social hierarchy into account in her analysis. She has chosen immigrants as one category and the socio-economic elite as another. The relevant palliative unit's catchment area has had importance in this respect. Certain districts contained many immigrants while persons having an obviously high socio-economic background lived in other areas. The location of the residential area could be of importance for the nursing personnel's understanding of the patients' social situation. At the same time, according to nursing-care ideology, neither the relationship to nursing care nor its form was to differentiate according to ethnicity or socio-economic position. The nursing personnel were expected to live up to this ideal. This could, however, lead to certain difficulties when patients and their relatives with the highest socio-economic background proved to be more articulate and more demanding than others. On the other hand, such patients could also come into conflict with the nursing personnel if they acted too haughty or too snobbish.

One problem that could arise with immigrant patients from non-Western countries was that their relatives did not want the patient to receive detailed information about the situation of his or her illness and its fatal significance. Then the nursing personnel were caught in a dilemma between the family's wishes and the intentions of Swedish laws on health and nursing stating that all patients have the right to be informed of their diagnoses and prognoses. However, constructive meetings also occurred between the nursing personnel and this category of immigrant patients. The personnel especially noticed immigrant families' solidarity which was expressed in a special way in crisis situations, compared to what was observed in ethnic Swedish families.

In closing, I wish to emphasize that this contemporarily concentrated dissertation provides very factual glimpses of the life behind the scenes in connection with a form of nursing care that is not as well known for the public as that which is carried out in hospitals or in other types of public care institutions in Sweden. The study is an ex-

cellent example of a meeting between separate individuals and the collective in the form of society's outstretched hand. This meeting can be expressed as mutual cooperation, but can also easily lead to some cultural collisions. These must, however, be resolved so that nursing-care activities can function in a satisfactory manner. Eva M. Karlsson gives an impression of being a good fieldworker who has gained admission in the sensitive settings arising from the care of a terminally ill person in his or her home during the last period of that person's life. She has succeeded in combining proximity to the field of study with a necessary analytical distance. This is shown in the critical comments which in certain instances have emerged concerning the practical application of this form of nursing care. The accumulated evidence is linked in the analysis to the theoretical discussions which have been conducted not only in international sociology, but also in contemporary Swedish ethnology in recent years.

Norwegian school tours to Nazi concentration camps

Kyrre Kverndokk. Pilgrim, turist og elev. Norske skoleturer til døds- og konsentrasjonsleirer. Linköping. University of Linköping 2007. Linköping Studies in Arts and Science no. 403. 294 pp. Diss. Illustrated. English summary. ISBN 978-91-85895-97-7.

The Norwegian cultural historian Kyrre Kverndokk has presented his doctoral dissertation at the University of Linköping in Sweden. Its theme concerns contemporary Norwegian school tours to former Nazi concentration camps in Poland and Germany. The author's intention is to study how the past can be made meaningful for the school pupils involved. The tours are organized by the trust "Hvite busser til Auschwitz" ("White busses to Auschwitz") which began such activities in 1992. The intention was to combat neo-Nazism which had then begun to make itself felt both in Norway and elsewhere in Europe. The pupils who have participated in the tours have been fifteen years of age. Prior to their departure, they have met with a so-called time-witness. This witness is Norwegian, a former prisoner of war who was interned in a concentration camp and who can talk about his or her experiences and impressions. In 2003 approximately 16 000 Norwegian pupils, or about one-fourth of the form, participated in such tours.

These tours can primarily be considered as having the character of pilgrimages to the death camps. In addition, they are a form of tourist excursion, in that the pupils visit a number of attractive tourist sites in addition to the death camps. That is why the author has used the two terms "pilgrim" and "tourist" in the title of his publication.

Theoretically speaking, the author utilizes ritual theories to a great extent. This relates both to Paul Connerton's theory of memorial rites and Victor Turner's model for rites of passage. Kverndokk considers the school tours to be memorial rites. In their aspect of rites of passage, they can be divided into three parts. The first is the preparation or separation phase, followed by an intensive journey which makes up a liminal or border phase, and finally, a phase of supplementary work. This latter task includes a presentation of the pupils' impressions from their tour for their teachers, parents and siblings. An analysis of the content of the time-witness's narratives is also marked by a division into three. Its structure consists first of a description of the invasion, then the occupation and, finally, the liberation.

The fieldwork on which the dissertation is based was carried out by the author in 2004 in the form of observations and interviews. 45 interviews have been conducted with 40 people. Ten interviews have been conducted with former concentration camp prisoners. The author also participated in and documented all phases of one school tour, from the preparations for the tour itself, to the supplementary work. Each of the three phases has been given a separate chapter in the publication. The study concentrates on a school in Oslo where such tours have been organized since 1997. Ten pupils chosen as key informants were studied in detail. Five sets of parents were interviewed. The names of both the school and the informants have been anonymized. This means that the author has not been able to make actual use of the plentiful photographic material assembled during the tour. During interviews with the pupils after they had arrived back home, however, these photographs had an important function in assisting the pupils to verbalize their experiences of the tour.

The chapter on the preparation or separation phase informs the reader that the pupils themselves had earned the money for their tour. This was done, for example, by selling cookies and waffles while the pupils told purchasers about their proposed tour as well. They also met a time-witness ahead of time, a man who had been imprisoned in various concentration camps between 1942 and 1945. They also listened to the experiences of other pupils, among them elder siblings, who had previously participated on a tour of this kind. Moreover, they watched a documentary film made by a former pupil during his tour. Just before departure, the teacher distributed notebooks that the pupils were to use as their private travel diaries in which experiences and impressions were to be continually recorded.

A subsequent chapter examines the tour itself as ritual praxis in the field of tension between pilgrimage and tourist excursion. The tour by bus is interpreted by the author as the first portion of a liminal space extraneous to ordinary daily life. Spirits and other stimulants were strictly forbidden in this phase; spirits constituted an absolute ritual boundary. The next portion of the liminal space begins with the arrival at the concentration camp chosen as the goal of the pilgrimage. This develops into a

horror-filled journey through history in which the pupils' expectations are confronted with a tangible reality on a foreign site. Many pupils began to cry although they still used their cameras to take many photographs. This would lead to reality being even more evident after they arrived home. The pupils were involved in a memorial ceremony in the camp by laying down flowers, lighting a torch and reading a text. Photographs were forbidden during this ceremony. After the visit to the death camps, a more exhilarated feeling arose during which the pupils were to experience Krákow as tourists. As is clearly shown in the diary notations, the most important element here was shopping.

A third main chapter presents and discusses the tour's third phase which consisted of developing and presenting the impressions of the tour after having arrived back home in Oslo. The pupils wrote long reports on their experiences and recollections. The author has been allowed to read and analyse these written contributions which include the assembled photographic material. In this context, Paul Connerton's theory of memorial rites proves especially valuable. The last step in the ritual process consisted of the presentation at the parents' meeting. Then the pupils assumed the ritual role of new witnesses with personal testimony about the concentration camps. The obligation for a continual creation of new witnesses is really the ultimate goal of these tours.

My main impression is that this dissertation adds important aspects to current research in several fields. These include issues about enlivening history, not least the more horrible portions of it. For people of our day and age, this can be experienced as diffuse, even if many now find this to be of increasing interest. Research on pilgrims, which is very prominent in Catholic countries, can also have secular alternatives, as has been shown in this dissertation. Tourism does not have to be a mere entertainment and consumption industry, but can also be combined with experiences of the more serious and traumatic events experienced by other persons in the past. The author has, in addition, made a contribution to the cultural research on death which in international terms has shown immense growth in later years.

Norwegian immigrants' funerary rituals

Cora Alexa Døving: Norsk-pakistanske begravelsesritualer – en migrasjonsstudie. Oslo, University of Oslo. Acta Humaniora nr 20, 2005. ISSN 0806-3222. 244 pp. Ill. Diss.

Cora Alexa Døving has chosen funerary rituals among Pakistani immigrants to Norway as the subject of her doctoral thesis in the history of religion. This immigration,

which reaches back to 1967, increased markedly in the 1970s. Many immigrants from the same regions of Pakistan, particularly the Punjab, arrived in company with close relatives. In 2002, approximately 22 000 Pakistani lived in Norway, some 17 000 of these in Oslo. The immigrants are primarily Sunni Muslims, but there are also some few Christian families.

Døving's fieldwork consists of observations made in connection with deaths and funerals, and forty qualitative interviews from Oslo. She has also visited some of the immigrants' home regions in Punjab where she participated in visits of condolence and studied local Norse-Pakistani burial grounds. Such burial grounds are for the most part located in country districts and smaller towns.

Praxis, in the sense of action, is an important concept in discussions about rituals. Døving does not, however, place special emphasis on the intention and meaning that actions have for her subjects but, instead, under-communicates this symbolic aspect. The central theme of the thesis is change, as this is illustrated by the process of adaptation that Pakistani funerary rituals must undergo in their encounter with Norwegian society.

The corpses of approximately 80% of the Pakistani immigrants who have died in Norway have been flown back to their home districts in Pakistan after being placed in zinc coffins. Children are often buried in Oslo and, increasingly, some adults as well. Areas set aside for Muslim burials are now found at Klemetsrud and Høybråten cemeteries.

Upon the death of a Muslim, the corpse is required to be washed as soon as possible according to a ceremonial ritual and then be shrouded. In Norway, since 1993, this ceremony has been organised by a Pakistani funeral committee and has taken place in the chapel of the Department of Pathology at Ullevål Hospital in Oslo. Before the departure for Pakistan, a funeral prayer, a *janaza*, is recited in the mosque. A corresponding prayer is recited on arrival at the burial ground in Pakistan. One difference between a funeral in Oslo and in Pakistan is that the traditional meal for the poor is not held in Norway, because there are too few poor Muslim immigrants to make this necessary. This has posed a problem, because this particular meal served to increase *sawab* for the deceased, a reward that benefits the dead person while in the grave and, finally, on the Day of Judgement. A solution to this problem was found in the sending of alms to the poor in Pakistan instead of arranging a meal. A former ritual has thus been prolonged, even though its form has been altered.

Both ethnic Pakistani and Norwegian organisations are involved when a funeral is to take place. Ethnic Pakistani funeral committees have been formed and have assumed responsibility for contacts with both the Norwegian firms of undertakers and the imam of the local mosque. In this way they become a link in a process of integration. The committees also assume financial responsibility for the expenses of the

firm of undertakers. Norwegian cemetery officials have for their part conducted discussions with the Islamic Council of Norway, which represents all the Muslim peoples in Norway, and have not limited such discussions to Pakistani Muslims only. Among agreements that have been reached is one allowing the coffins of married couples to be placed on top of each other in keeping with Norwegian custom, even though this was previously unknown among Muslims. This was an instance of a reinterpretation of both Muslim praxis and Sharia law taking place in an immigrational context. Both Norwegian cemetery officials and hospitals have also shown interest in arriving at practical solutions through a process of mutual understanding and not, primarily, by means of dictatorial attitudes based on the laws of the Norwegian majority society. Such discussions have thus led to mutual compromise.

From the very moment of death and until the funeral, the deceased's entire social network is alerted, something that in turn leads to joint activity. Collective ways of thinking dominate completely, constituting an obvious difference in comparison to those of ethnic Norwegians. The network encompasses both relatives, friends and acquaintances in the broadest sense of the term. They participate in ceremonies such as the cleansing of the corpse, the prayers for the deceased in the mosque, the *janaza*, etc. In the Norwegian context, ethnic affiliation as a Pakistani is more important than the Islamic religious school of thought – Sunni, Shia, Ahmadiyya, or even minority Christian – to which the deceased belonged in Pakistan and, later, in Norway. Religious differences arising in the original milieu become less evident and less important in a new situation marked by migration and a minority position.

Spontaneous loans of money from the extensive network also occur, especially for the purpose of paying for the costs of the air journey to Pakistan. These loans are not written down or signed, but are based entirely on trust and mutual confidence, exhibiting in this way a religious aspect in the form of the loaner's gratitude to Allah. The fact that the corpse is sent to Pakistan is also important in that it gives family and friends there an opportunity for taking farewell with the deceased through viewing his or her face. The network does indeed extend out over vast geographical areas.

Døving places great emphasis on being able to explain why the percentage of those buried in Pakistan is as high as approximately 80%. What significance lies in the country of Pakistan, the family in Pakistan, the Islamic religion etc? The choice of burial place can be indicative of the degree of the immigrants' integration in Norway. What is conclusive, according to Døving, is not so much the fact of the deceased being returned to the nation of Pakistan or to a Muslim territory, but, rather, to the social network that the deceased had experienced during life. With an increase in the period of time that elapses after immigration to Norway, however, the social network in Norway assumes far more importance. The immigrants thus experience a longer expanse of time away from people in Pakistan. This is true of the middle-aged and, es-

pecially, of the younger generations who have no desire to return to their country of origin. This, in turn, illustrates how the focus of the network changes over time, and can lead the Pakistani to becoming more inclined to bury their dead in Norway. A tendency of this kind has become noticeable in most recent years, indicating an increase of integration into the new country. The graveside prayers which contribute to providing *sawab* for the deceased no longer need to take place in Pakistan, but can be carried out at cemeteries in Norway as well. The occurrence of such prayers is, naturally enough, dependent on where the social network is located.

Another change noted by Norwegian firms of undertakers is that the Norse-Pakistani have become more interested in the choice of the type of coffin. This was previously of little concern. Coffins were something required by Norwegian law, but not something normally used in the native Pakistani setting. An adjustment was necessary.

Eulogies in praise of the deceased, which never took place in Pakistan, have begun to be used in a Norwegian context. This innovation is an obvious example of the consequences of cultural contacts with Norwegian society, even though it has never been a matter for statutory regulation. Norwegians of officially recognised positions, in other words prominent representatives of the majority culture such as the Lord Mayor of Oslo and the leader of the Norwegian Labour Party, were the first to hold such eulogies over Norse-Pakistani, primarily over those who had attained an officially recognised status. The speeches are a reflection of these Pakistanis' position and success in Norway. The idea of integration in Norwegian society has in this way received a ritualised form.

One of Døving's fundamental ideas is that Norse-Pakistani funerary rituals have not been weakened in a migration situation, as has been claimed in previous immigration research. They have, instead, been altered and renewed while traditions from Pakistan have at the same time formed an important, but not exclusively decisive basis. Tradition and renewal have proceeded hand-in-hand in a flexible manner after having been placed in a new situation of life.

In my considered opinion, which I would like to emphasise in closing, Døving has carried out an independent, analytical study. This becomes clear whenever she conducts a critical investigation of the results of previous research and theoretical analysis. Such analyses are consistently linked to the author's own compilation of empirical data. In several instances, the author then arrives at results differing from those of previous research. If the constructive connection between theory and empirical data may be considered the strongest point of the thesis, the methodological discussions might still have been developed further. A more profound methodological discussion concerning fieldwork compilation of interviews and the observations of a migratory setting in Scandinavia would have had special value seen from a pedagogical point of view.

Døving's thesis constitutes a major new orientation in the study of the history of religion in Oslo due to its focus on fieldwork instead of textual analysis, and due to the problematics lying in migrations that lead to the meeting between a third-world culture and religion, and a culturally and religiously distant Scandinavia. A study of this kind has great importance considering the massive immigration from other parts of the world that has taken place in recent decades, not the least to Norway. This thesis may well become an important source of inspiration for future studies of migration and cultural meetings in the fields of folklore, cultural history and the history of religion.

Expressions of grief on German roadsides

Christine Aka: Unfallkreuze. Trauerorte am Strassenrand. Waxmann. Münster/New York/Munich/Berlin 2007. 299 pp. English summary. ISBN 978-3-8309-1790-8.

Christine Aka has published a wide-ranging study of the crosses erected at scenes of fatal traffic accidents in the province of Westphalia-Lippe in north-western Germany. The present publication is a habilitation work (qualifying the author at the level of a Swedish *docent*, or reader) in the fields of history and philosophy. It has been submitted to and approved by the Wilhelms University of Münster in Westphalia.

The overall approach of the book is to determine why people consider scenes of accidents as being special places and, further, the meaning attributed to the various symbols on and around the crosses. Is this merely a matter of commemoration or is something more involved? The author has seen the study of emotions and personal motivations as being more important than any investigation of rituals associated with the crosses.

The study has an obvious empirical basis. The author has herself searched for and created photographic documentation of the crosses and the decorations surrounding them. Such decorations take the form of flowers, candles, letters, photographs of the deceased, toys etc. In some cases, the crosses and their surroundings have been photographed at different times in order to study how the decorations change during the various seasons and with the passage of time since the occurence of the accident. The crosses disappear after a shorter or longer period of time, as has been documented by means of repeated fieldwork. A large number of the assembled photographs, both in colour and black-and-white, have been reproduced in the book.

A total of 250 crosses were documented in the years 2000 to 2002. They have been erected to commemorate younger persons, especially in the age category 18 to 25 years, who have been killed. The majority of these victims are young men and

only very seldom young women or older persons. Many of the young men have been riding motorcycles.

The author has also conducted interviews with the victims' relatives and close friends. Undertaking such interviews involves certain ethical and emotional implications for the scholar, as is to some extent discussed by the author. She advertised for possible informants in newspapers, on the radio and on television. A number of people, mostly women and mothers of the victims, contacted her. They said that they were prepared to recount their difficult experiences. They were in the 50-to-60-year age group and belonged to many different occupational groups. The author conducted and recorded interviews lasting some three to four hours with fifteen families in their homes. Some of these informants were Catholics, but the majority were Protestants or non-believers. In addition to interviews in a family setting, sixteen telephone interviews were carried out with informants who did not wish to be contacted in their homes. They wished to maintain a certain distance to the interviewer due to the topic's extremely emotive character. The author has also made contact with twenty-two friends of the accident victims. Numerous anonymized quotations are found in the text presented by the author in her book. Some informants have let her see their collections of newspaper articles and letters to the editors concerning the accident and also their own photographs of the relevant accident site. Mourners have even taken letters containing messages to the deceased person to their homes in order to copy them. Such letters have been placed near the crosses by anonymous or, in some cases, identifiable friends.

The persons being interviewed have placed great emphasis on trying to imagine the final minutes before the accident occurred. In some cases, they have engaged the services of a spiritualistic medium. Mourners find a certain consolation in the fact that the deceased has not suffered pain. Most of them have decided to visit the site of the accident as soon as possible. They are accompanied by relatives or close friends in order to reduce their anquish. The wooden crosses that are usually placed at the site immediately after the accident have been made and erected by male relatives or friends. The author interprets this as being an expression of men's emotions through practical actions. The crosses that have appeared in connection with the initial state of shock have contributed to giving parents a certain amount of comfort. The continued visitations to and decoration of the accident sites are, however, carried out by women, not men. There are many instances of a number of crosses being erected to commemorate the same victim. This has been done by different individuals in the immediate circle of the deceased's relatives and friends.

In a historical sense, crosses alongside roads have been common in Catholic districts for many years. They are especially linked to a wave of Catholic revivalism in the mid-1800s. The religious symbolism expressed as gratitude and prayers for pro-

tection has been paramount. The author does not believe, however, that the newly erected and contemporary crosses constitute a continuation of an older religious tradition. These new crosses are, in fact, never interpreted in religious terms by relatives or friends, except by the three actively practising Catholic families interviewed by the author. In such cases, the crosses can sometimes take the form of a crucifix. This is the more case in the Catholic-dominated Bavaria than in the religiously intermingled Westphalia.

Several informants have had difficulties in giving verbal expression for their motives in erecting the crosses. Ideas of giving proof of love and remembrance are usually dominant reasons. Conceptions about warning other road users sometimes also arise. Crosses are seen as being symbols of death and publicly expressed sorrow and not as communicating any specific Christian meaning. A comparably melancholy opinion of crosses on gravestones is something I have observed in recent years in Sweden (see chapter 2). In Norway and Sweden, however, crosses have only minor importance in the marking of a roadside accident site (see chapter 7). Symbols expressing light, especially candles, flowers and written messages, have instead been used. Manifestations of this kind have also begun to be expressed on the Internet.

The author's investigations indicate that the use of lighted candles is especially evident during the first days following an accident, and that they can then be present in great numbers. According to the informants, candles stimulate memories of the deceased, and that they therefore should not be put out during this first period. They do not indicate any religious trains of thought, such as the placement of lighted candles on graves previously expressed.

Flowers are just as customarily used as lighted candles at the scenes of accidents. They are seen as being a gift to the victim and are eventually replaced by artificial flowers. A tree can be planted in certain cases to express a memory that will continue to exist for a long period of time. Among objects placed at the site are angels, figures of St Nicolas and Christmas cards at Christmas-time, and bunny rabbits and eggs during Easter. Teddy bears and other toys are also fairly common. In addition, stimulants such as beer and cigarettes can be left as a symbolical gift to the victim. I have found nothing comparable to this in Norway or Sweden where there is no connection between food and graves in recent years. Another phenomenon that I have not observed in Norway or Sweden concerns the placement of crushed parts of the accident vehicle, such as a broken wing mirror or a brake light from a motorcycle. The accident's horrifying substance is thus made visible to the onlooker in a grotesque form. Photographs of the deceased also can be met with in some cases.

The many instances of written messages which have been placed by the crosses, and which often have been composed by young people, have an extremely emotional content. They express powerlessness and helplessness, but also include specific greet-

ings to the deceased. This shows that the mourner expects that a form of proximity can be achieved by means of an imaginary dialogue with the victim. The writer thus transcends the boundary between the living and the dead. She or he can conceive of a coming reunion in a vague future, something that is in keeping with neo-religious tendencies. Religion and ritual actions have in this way obviously become individualized. The interviews also reveal a general impression that the next of kin expect to meet the deceased in an unknown future, although this is not taken as evidence of any belief in God (cf. chapter 8).

Decorating and visiting the scene of the accident on the first anniversary after it has occurred have come to have a special importance. This is something I have also observed in Norway and Sweden in recent years (see chapter 7). The new rituals that have arisen have become of obvious aid to the next of kin in connection with the lengthy process of mourning. They constitute a clear indication of the fact that the circle of friends and relatives has not forgotten the shocking event. Such tangible actions on anniversaries also indicate that death in our time is neither thrust away out of sight or tabooed.

The book reviewed here has been of great interest in that it provides a comparative perspective on the development of death rituals in Norway and Sweden, which have been enormously transformed in later years. There are both similarities and differences in relation to Germany. Cultural scientific research on death rituals and grief, which in international usage is termed *thanatology*, has increased markedly in Scandinavia during the past years and been the source of several new publications. It is important that such research continues to be aware of comparable events in the nearby, non-Nordic world, something that this review has attempted to illuminate.